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Editorial

NO WRITER of science-fiction would be ashamed to have come up with the idea recently advanced by two Naval Research Laboratory scientists. Their suggestion: a scheme to bathe the Earth in eternal daylight.

Drs. Herbert Friedman and James Purcell got their idea as a result of observing Saturn. They deduced that Saturn very likely never experienced night because of the light reflected from the debris making up its rings. It was a simple step from there to suggest that perpetual daylight on Earth could be made possible if we placed a ring of dust around our planet to pick up sunlight and reflect it to the darkside of the world.

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Of course, no night would put a serious crimp in many human activities. We offer for free to any s-f writer this germ of a story idea: what would happen to an Earth where the sun shone 24 hours a day? No crime? Bankruptcy for the pajama manufacturers and the electric-light-bulb makers? Should we all invest in suntan lotion stocks?—NL

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FAN 4-0

DOOMSDAY ARMY

By JACK SHARKEY

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It was a lucky thing for earth that Capt. Harry Coyne, the man who could fix squeaky doors and fluttery cookbooks, was on tap when the alien fleet arrived.

MARSHA Coyne stirred listlessly at the mixture of carrots, potatoes and meat that she hoped would somehow turn itself into lamb stew if she only stirred long enough. The cookbook pages, propped open with the salt and pepper shakers, kept slithering from beneath their negligible weight and closing, hiding the recipe from her eyes.

"Harry!" she hollered through the open doorway into the living room, where her husband, in shirtsleeves and one-day growth of whiskers, sat hypnotized by the Saturday afternoon football game. "Wouldja c'mere a minute?"

"Yeah, yeah," he called, not moving his eyes a fraction from their magnetized focus. "Coming." Without unlocking his gaze, Harry arose

slowly from the chair, and backed out toward the kitchen, his arms making small pistoning motions as he shared an end run with the ball carrier on the screen. "Damn. Offside," Harry breathed disgustedly. He turned at last to face his wife. "Yeah, Mar, what's up?"

His wife, not ceasing her monotonous stirrings within the aluminum pot, nodded toward the recalcitrant cookbook. "It keeps closing, Harry, and I don't know what to add next. Hold it for me, will you?"

Harry reached for the book, then spun about too late as a wild cheer rang out from the set in the room behind him. "Damn. Fumble and recovery!" he muttered. "And I missed it. Here—" he said,



Even the General was tongue-tied when faced with an alien over two-hundred feet tall.

opening the book. "Where's it at?"

"Next page."

He flipped to the indicated page, scanned the sheet to find the recipe, and on doing so, simply tore the page out of the book and laid it flat on the table beside the stove, while Marsha fought an impulse to groan. "There y'are."

He started back for his game, whistling.

"Harry—I could have done *that*!" Marsha complained. "You've ruined the cookbook!"

"Fix it later. Scotch tape." He left the room.

Marsha sighed and went on stirring. After eight years of marriage to Harry, she might have known what to expect. He never failed to take the simplest method of solving any given problem, even if the solution presented problems of its own. She looked toward his back as he settled himself once more in the armchair before the TV, and had to smile.

In a way, it made sense. The book kept closing over the page — therefore — take the page away from the book. She thought back ruefully to some of Harry's more outstanding brainstorm, applying instant remedies with no foresight whatsoever. Like the time

she'd mentioned the annoying creak in the kitchen door, and Harry had, while she was out at the store, simply taken it off the hinges and stored it in the cellar, leaving their kitchen open to every stray cat, dog or vagabond in the neighborhood. True, it had solved the immediate problem of the squeak, but—

Marsha sighed and kept stirring the stew. "I've just got to remember not to ask for help, that's all," she said half-aloud. "I'm better off with my problems than with aid from Harry."

It was the last quarter of the game, while Marsha was setting the table for supper, when the "Special CBS News Bulletin" sign superceded the gridiron on the TV. Marsha paused with the sugar bowl in both hands, watching the screen over Harry's shoulder. She hated special bulletins. Whenever one of those signs flashed on, she always expected to hear that the Russians were on their way with The Bomb. She held her breath, awaiting the newscaster's voice.

After a moment, it came.

"Special CBS News Bulletin, from CBS Studios in New York . . ." said a well-modulated baritone voice. It

sounded like Walter Cronkite to Marsha. She hoped it was he. Marsha trusted Walter Cronkite. "Civil Defense has reported the sighting of a fleet of Unidentified Flying Objects moving due west across the Atlantic Ocean. First sighted from Montauk Point, at the eastern tip of Long Island, the fleet is expected, at present speeds, to be over the New York area within an hour. Stay tuned to this channel for further details." The gridiron reappeared, and the football game continued as though nothing had happened.

"Harry—" Marsha said, hesitantly. "Do you think—?"

"Can't be serious, honey," Harry said, ungluing his eyes from the screen for a moment. "If it were, I'd be getting a call from my National Guard unit to report in for emergency duty."

"Oh," said Marsha.

The telephone jangled harshly.

"Oh no!" said Marsha.

Harry, fairly resplendent in his new Army green uniform, with its gleaming captain's bars, deployed his men efficiently in a semicircle from the water on the east to the water on the west, neatly circumscribing Battery Park, at

the southernmost tip of Manhattan Island. The men clutched their M-14's with perspiring hands, their eyes darting here and there in the bright blue, but cloud-cluttered, sky over the bay.

"Captain Coyne, sir," said Master Sergeant Ames, not looking at his officer, but watching the air over the water, "what makes the big brass think they'll land here? Or land at all?"

"Somebody reported their angle of descent," Harry said. "If it continues, they'll either have to land, or crash into the backside of Wall Street. Or, of course, pull up and go on," he added, after a moment's consideration.

"Think they're gonna be dangerous," Ames asked, his ice-blue eyes blinking nervously, "maybe with atomic weapons?"

"Maybe," said Harry. "Maybe not." It wasn't a good answer, but it was his duty as an officer to inspire confidence. He daren't seem the least bit unsure. However, he made his declaration of a fifty-fifty chance sound like a hard, super-accurate evaluation of conditions, and Sergeant Ames looked definitely relieved.

"Thank you, sir," he said, returning to his sky-scanning.

"There they come!" someone screamed, jerking a waving arm toward the sky. A man along the line yelped, dropped his rifle, and turned to run. Harry was there immediately.

"All right, soldier, give me ten!" he ordered.

"N-now, sir?" the man, a young private, squeaked.

"Now!" Harry's voice was adamant.

The man hesitated, then dropped prone on the grass and did eight of the required pushups before collapsing on his face, pooped.

"Now get back in that line, and pick up your weapon!"

"Yes, sir," the man sulked, going and doing so.

By the time Harry returned his eyes to the sky, the fleet was greatly in evidence. Harry squinted against the sunlight, trying to count the ships. "Boy!" he said, hardly realizing he'd spoken loud. "There're at least twenty of them. And the *size* of them!" He gave a long, low whistle, indicating just how big.

"Shall I have the men open fire, sir?" Ames queried.

"Don't be silly," Harry barked, irritably. "They're still a half-mile out. 'Wait'll they land, for pete's sake!'"

"They won't *fit*, sir!" Ames said, frightened. "There are

too many of them. Just *one* would crowd the park."

"We shall see," said Harry, feeling that this was about as true a statement as he'd yet made. "Have the men hold their fire until I give orders to the contrary."

"Yes, sir," Ames said smartly, and trotted off to relay the order, leaving Harry to observe the airborne newcomers.

He watched, fascinated despite himself, as the fleet came gliding in over the waters of the bay, their shadows pacing them over the white-capped waves below. Even as he looked, the great flat saucers began to slow down, more and more, until they were fairly *creeping* through the air toward Battery Park. "Incredible!" Harry murmured. "What's holding them *up* at that ridiculous air-speed?"

He studied the nearest ship closely as it came down. It was inching forward, now, at about one mile an hour, a low buzzing sound coming from somewhere inside it. The buzzing grew stronger as it got nearer the ground, until Harry felt as vibratory as if he were upon one of those foot-easing machines at Coney Island. Then the buzzing slid down the sonic scale and

stopped, as the great saucer, with a sullen "whump!" came to a flat stop on the gravel and grass of Battery Park.

Harry looked at it in wonder. At dead center, it had a sort of bulge, or blip, rising above the streamlined slope of the saucer like an after-thought-type metal igloo. A tall antenna, rising from the center of this igloo, suddenly began to glow, with a fine pink light that hurt his eyes. Abruptly, from the underside of the second ship, already overshadowing the first, there came a similar pink glow. Then pink lightning lanced from glow to glow, and locked. And, as Harry stood stupefied, this lightning drew the two ships together, until the second ship made a metallic "whump!" of its own, leaving the two nested together like the two halves of a yo-yo. And then the process was repeated with the next ship, and the next, and next, until all had landed.

"I'll be damned," Harry mumbled. "Like a stack of flapjacks!"

Sergeant Ames came loping back from the men. "Shall we open fire, sir?" he asked, respectfully.

"Better wait, and see if they're hostile," Harry said.

"But sir," Ames quavered.

"If they *are* hostile, we may not get *time* to fire!"

"Well," Harry said philosophically, "it'll save ammunition."

Together, the two men stared at the new structure that loomed skyward in the park. There were twenty-five ships in all, the composite tower rearing about twenty stories high. As the last buzzing died away into the already twilit air, Harry turned to Ames.

"Better have the men rig up a battery of searchlights to keep this area bright. We don't want anybody sneaking out of those things after dark."

"Good idea, sir," said Ames, hurrying off.

When he returned, Harry was as he had left him, tall, upright, staring fixedly at the strange new "building" in the park. It was a moment before Ames spoke.

"Sir," he faltered, "what are you thinking about?"

Harry sighed, a sigh that came from deep within his rugged frame. "Lamb stew," he said.

"I've been so worried," Marsha said, as Harry drew his chair wearily up to the table. "What happened?"

"Nothing," Harry grunted,

as she ladled the re-heated stew onto his plate. "That's the annoying thing: Nothing happened at all. They buzzed in, stacked up, cut their engines, and then just sat. No one came out. No more noise. No more motion. Nothing. It's—It's eerie."

"It's the Russians," Marsha said positively, seating herself opposite him, and helping herself from the bowl of stew. "I knew this would happen."

"Radio Moscow denies everything," Harry pointed out.

"They always do," Marsha pouted. "Who believes them?"

Harry twitched his shoulders, irritably. "So what if it is them? We're no better off than we would be with aliens."

Marsha shivered. "I wish you wouldn't use that word."

"Think of a better one, and I'll use that," Harry said, starting on his stew.

Marsha, hurt, fell silent. However, this had no effect on her husband, who was too hungry to notice, so she swallowed her pride, and spoke again. "How long till you go back?"

"Morning. About nine. Carson's keeping the watch for me, so I can get some sleep. What time is it, anyway?"

"Just past twelve," she said, after a glance at the kitchen clock above the stove. Then, "Do—" She found it hard to speak. "Do you think . . . they mean us harm?"

"If they sit there long enough, we'll probably start cutting our way inside to find out," he said, wiping up the last of the gravy from his plate with a wad of bread. "We can't just *leave* the damned thing there!"

"Why not?" said Marsha, rather snappishly.

"Because—" Harry began, then thought hard. Finally, he grunted, "Just because!"

"Maybe they're friendly," Marsha hazarded.

"Possibly," Harry said, drinking down his milk. He was too sleepy to risk a cup of coffee. "Then again, they may be just loading their ray pistols."

"Harry!" Marsha said.

"Sorry," he said, truly apologetic. "Sleepy. 'Night, honey." He got up from the table, kissed her cheek lightly, and went out of the room. Marsha sat there, suddenly very tired. She looked at the kitchen door—which still creaked—then at the ragged-edged cookbook page on the sink.

"I hope they don't leave any

decisions up to Harry," she sighed. Tired though she was, she knew she wouldn't get to sleep. Almost grateful for the excuse, Marsha poured herself a steaming cup of coffee.

Harry, after an hour's fitful tossing amongst rumpled sheets, gave up and got into uniform again. He came out of the bedroom and peered into the kitchen. Marsha, her head pillowed on her arms, lay asleep at the edge of the table, a half-filled cup of cold black coffee before her. Harry hesitated, then got a throw-cushion from the living room sofa, and lifted her head enough to place this beneath it. Then he kissed her gently on the lips, careful not to awaken her, and left the apartment.

"Captain Coyne!" said lieutenant Paul Carson with some surprise, as Harry strode into the emergency Headquarters quonset set up at the edge of the park. "You're not due till morning."

"Couldn't sleep," Harry explained briefly. "Any change?"

"Nope." Paul shook his head and yawned. "The most trouble I've had is from a steady stream of brass. Damn! Even a general, from Governor's Island. I was al-

most hoping some alien *would* take a potshot while they were strolling around the base of that thing!"

"That's treason," Harry said without rancor, lighting a cigarette and sitting back in a canvas folding chair. "They all give up?" Paul nodded. "What'd the Pentagon say?"

"They're sending up 'experts', by jet," Paul snorted.

"Didn't know we *had* any experts on aliens," Harry laughed.

"We have now, apparently," Paul said, shaking his head. "Undoubtedly by special act of Congress!"

"How're the men taking it?"

"Usual reactions. The monotony of the vigil's beginning to get through to them. I already broke up one crap game."

"Good," Harry said. "May's well let them relax a bit till something breaks. They'll be better if they don't wait in a state of constant tension." He dropped his cigarette and ground it out under his heel. "My wife thinks it's the reds."

"Can't be," Paul said, wryly. "If it were, they'd be bragging about it by now."

"That's true," Harry said. "When're these 'experts' due?"

"Any time at all. Scientists, anthropologists, and lots of brass. It's the brass I dread. They always want to know why such-and-such hasn't been done."

"Why *hasn't* such-and-such been done?"

"Probably because such-and-such isn't important enough to bother with. You know the kind of idiotic thing, Captain. 'Why isn't that man's belt-buckle polished?', or 'Are those regulation searchlights?' "

"They're just covering feelings of inferiority," Harry said solemnly. "I read that in a book."

"I'd like to borrow it, sometime," said Paul.

Someone knocked on the quonset door.

"Here we go," Paul groaned, getting up. "Everybody say 'cheese'."

Four hours later, with dawn just breaking redly out over the bay, the last scientist made his last note and came back to join the group at the quonset.

"I suppose," said General Bryant, his grey eyebrows knitted portentously, "the metal is not of terrestrial origin?"

The scientist, a Doctor Emery Freid, looked up im-

patiently. "Don't be an ass," he said. "There are only so many elements on the periodic scale, General. It's a strange alloy, but most certainly of known metals."

General Bryant reddened, but blustered on. "How'd you manage to get a sampling of it? I should think it'd resist all efforts to take a scraping."

"Where'd you learn your metallurgy, *Weird Tales*?" said Freid. "I have a diamond-tipped sampling tool. Diamonds are still the hardest substance known."

"If you're going to be *snotty* . . . !" said General Bryant, and walked stiffly away.

Freid gave a little shudder, like a man trying to shake off a coating of dust from his clothes. "He should stick to his job, and I'll stick to mine," he said, to no one in particular.

Harry cleared his throat and spoke up.

"What did you find out, sir?" he asked, feeling this was a safe enough query.

Freid spread his hands. "What's to learn? They're made of metal. Looks like copper, mostly, but there seems to be a strain of magnesium and tungsten present, also. I'd guess the alloy depended on copper for flexibility, magne-

sium for lightness, and tungsten for heat-resistance—lots of friction entering the atmosphere."

"I thought that tungsten oxidized rather rapidly," Harry said. "Isn't that why they use it in a vacuum in bulbs?"

Freid's wide grey eyes looked at Harry with respect. "Yes, as a matter of fact. I haven't figured out yet why this particular alloy hasn't burnt up. But I will. How'd you learn that, anyhow?"

Harry flushed. "Junior High Physics."

"Don't be ashamed," said Freid. "We've all got to start somewhere. Anyhow, as for the rest—well—there seems to be no radioactivity present in the area, so that would pre-suppose a non-atomic power source . . . Or damned fine shielding."

"Anything else?" Harry asked.

"'Fraid not. I rode a helicopter up to get a look at that top ship, hoping to find something from the antenna you mentioned in your report. Except that it has no antenna. None at all."

Harry blinked. "Damn. Then they must *always* land in this order. Now I come to think of it, the first ship in was flat on the bottom, with no hollow to receive one of

those metal bulges or antenna. Creepy, huh?"

Freid nodded slowly. "My sentiments exactly."

"What do you think we should do, bust in?" Harry went on.

Freid shrugged. "That's not my department."

General Bryant, standing forlornly out of earshot, finally decided he couldn't bear being left out of things and came back to the group. "I guess," he boomed, startling those who hadn't seen his approach, "the next move is ours. No doubt about it."

"Yes, sir," said Harry, glad for the chance of some action. "What's our move?"

"Sit tight," said General Bryant, "and wait."

"Oh," said Harry, disappointed.

"I'll send my report to Washington at once," Bryant went on, adding, in the best counterspy tradition, "Coded, of course."

He strode off briskly, leaving a disheartened group behind him. Paul Carson gnashed his teeth impotently.

"The fate of our nation," he grated. "In those two clumsy paws—" He stopped as Harry shot him a warning frown. Private conversation was one thing; insubordinate talk was

not proper in front of the doctor, a civilian.

Freid, as if unaware of Harry's demeanor, said to Paul, "I know you don't really mean that. General Bryant is just exposing more of his frightened uncertainty than you are. Could you do any better, in his place?"

Paul looked at Freid, then looked shamefacedly at the ground. "Guess not," he admitted.

"Daylight's almost full," Freid remarked, dropping the subject. "I think I'll catch some sleep, and come back later on. General Bryant knows where to reach me."

He'd just turned to go, when an apprehensive muttering, then an open shout, arose from the men encircling the piled-up space vessels. "*It's opening up!*"

Harry spun about, alert, his hand slipping to his holstered .45 with speed that would have made a western gun-fighter turn pale. However, it was Harry who turned pale, along with everybody else in Battery Park.

For not one, but *all* the ships were opening, simultaneously, beginning with a vertical crack that split the composite structure from ground to apex, and slowly slid back

until the erstwhile cylinder stood there like a twenty-story corrugated niche, exposing the alien.

Exposing the solitary alien, also twenty stories tall.

"*Yipe!*" said General Bryant. "That's impossible. It's—it's damned near incredible!"

"He must have come in *sections!*" Paul gasped.

"Hail, men of Earth!" said the alien, his voice echoing off the skyscrapers beyond the park. "I am the Doomsday Army."

"Ridiculous!" said General Bryant. "One man can't be an army!"

"Do not you earthmen have a term: one-man-army?"

Bryant sputtered, turned purple, then pink, then sputtered some more, unable to think of a comeback. Then everybody took a frantic backward leap as the shadow of the giant fell across them. He was squatting down, the better to see the group.

"So you're the earthmen," he marvelled. "Kind of puny, aren't you!" Even seated on his haunches, he was a good six stories taller than anyone present.

"What do you want, anyhow?" General Bryant said, with a slight return of officiousness. Harry felt a little guilty about the way he'd been

talking. It took guts to be stern with a giant alien. Or tremendous imbecility.

"I want this planet," said the alien. "Peacefully, if possible. If not— Well, I'm prepared to fight."

"So are we!" General Bryant roared. "With every weapon we have. You can't just walk in here— That is— Fly in here and take things over."

"Why can't I?" asked the alien, reasonably enough.

Once again, the general was reduced to sputtering. An officer finally led him to the quonset, and made him lie down with a wet rag on his forehead.

Harry seemed to be left in charge. "Now, look here," he said, in a voice that trembled more than he enjoyed, "we don't like the idea of using atomics this near one of our major cities, but if it becomes necessary, we will."

"Atomics, *pah!*" said the alien, snapping his fingers with a noise like a sharp thundercrack. "I'm immune to molecular dissolution."

"He—he's bluffing—" said Paul, nervously.

"Even if he isn't," Harry muttered, "I'd hate to disintegrate half of Manhattan Island finding out we're wrong."

He returned his attention to

the alien (from whom, by the way, his attention couldn't wander very far).

"Look, you, just what's your proposal? Some sort of coexistence?"

"Don't be silly," said the alien. "I can't spend the rest of my life avoiding stepping on people. I'll give you time, of course, but you must evacuate."

"The planet?" Harry cried. "The whole planet?"

"Certainly," said the alien. "You have a month."

"You're crazy!" Harry said angrily. "We couldn't get one hundredth of a percent of the population off in that time. *If* we intended to. Which we do not!" He felt kind of funny, making such official statements. After all, he was only a captain in the National Guard, hardly in a position to dictate planetary policy— On the other hand, he somehow could not help but feel that the federal attitude would be very similar to his own.

"I've made my declaration of intentions," the alien said, with an obviously feigned yawn of contempt. "You can do as I say, or not. It makes little difference to me. A month. Thirty days from now. Then I move in."

"You can't hope to live here

alone . . ." Harry argued. "What would be the purpose? Big as you are, you scarcely *crowd* the planet. Couldn't you settle for some uninhabited outlying area? The Sahara, perhaps, or one of the poles—"

"I should have explained," said the alien. "There are others coming. They'll be here at month's end. We intend to colonize this planet."

"Tell me," said Harry, his curiosity getting the better of his irritation, "do you *all* travel in—uh—in parts?"

"Naturally," said the alien. "A single ship large enough to carry me in unity with myself would be difficult to get airborne. Segregation is the only way."

"Might have known he'd be in favor of *that*," Paul spat.

"You sure you couldn't live just as well on Mars or Venus?" Harry offered weakly. "Or Jupiter! There's a really *big* planet for you, now! Plenty of room, and—"

"Mars is too oxygen-poor, Venus too wet, Jupiter too oppressively gravitational *and* too tiny and torrid, Saturn too dim—"

"Never mind, never mind, I get the idea," Harry muttered.

Doctor Freid, hitherto silent, spoke up.

"How can anyone your size stand up in our gravity? By

the laws of mass and volume, you should be too heavy to support your own weight."

The alien smiled. "By your standards, I'm practically hollow. I only weigh a few tons, really."

"Fascinating," said Doctor Freid.

"But now, I'm tired of squatting," said the alien, rising back up to his awesome—well, *more* awesome—full height. "I shall see you again, at the end of the month. Or, *not* see you again, ever, if you're smart, and heed my warning."

With that, he stepped back into the stacked-vessel "niche," and the opening curved back around him and sealed itself once more. Doctor Freid turned to Harry.

"What do you intend doing, Captain Coyne?" he said.

"What any American soldier would do," said Harry. "I'm going to pass the buck to the Pentagon."

"But what'd he *look* like?" Marsha urged. "The papers told his size, but that's about all, Harry . . ."

Harry, trying to doze on the sofa to catch up on his night's sleep which he'd missed, sighed and slid into a more-or-less upright position. "Like a man, honey, period. Hair kind of

funny-looking—lumpy, sort of—but otherwise just like a man. Seemed to be dressed in a sort of corduroy coverall, and alligator boots—or that's what they looked like, anyhow—and that's about it. Eyes were blue, I think. His complexion was terrible. It looked like a *Before* ad for a face cream."

"That's all?" Marsha complained. "Nothing unusual?"

"Not if you consider a height of two hundred feet usual."

"Oh," she pouted, "you know what I mean. No tentacles, or extra eyes, or anything like that?"

Harry frowned. "There *was* one thing . . . His eyes—They were lustreless. You know, no glistening from moisture. Just big whites, and blue irises, and dark pupils. Come to think of it, they reminded me of fly's eyes; you know what I mean? Faceted, sort of. Otherwise, though, he looked about like anyone else. Excepting the size, of course."

"Do you really think they'll evacuate the city?" she went on, ignoring the tired look in her husband's eyes. Marsha was a good wife, and her husband's health was of importance to her, but she was a woman first, and her curiosity

got the better of her solicitude.

"Of course not," Harry groaned. "I wish you wouldn't listen to rumors, Mar. What would be the point? The idiots who advocate evacuation followed by atomic bombing are not taking into consideration the fact that he said *others* are coming. Not to mention his claim to immunity."

"I don't see—if things are so inevitable—why you have to keep going back to stand guard," Marsha said.

Harry shrugged. "Probably won't have to, after a while. The way things stand, it's either destroy him, or give in. In either case, the guard would be disbanded. I give it another week, at most. Right now I'd like to sleep."

"I wonder why he came to New York," Marsha pondered. "Why not Washington?"

"Strategy, honey. Damned fine strategy, too. See, if it became necessary to actually drop a bomb on him, we could always get along without the capital; but our economy would dissolve in minutes if we lost Wall Street."

"You're being cynical," she accused.

"A little," he chuckled. "But he *is* in a safe locale, economically speaking. *Now* may I go to sleep?"

"Wait, let me see if I have any more questions."

Harry waited patiently while Marsha screwed up her face and thought hard. "Nope," she said finally. "No more."

"Good," said Harry. "Then I have one: How'd the game come out yesterday? I left before the end, and it was a tie score."

Marsha smiled in embarrassed apology. "Aw, Harry, you know I don't follow football. I—I turned the set off as soon as you left."

"Oh, fine," he groaned. "And I didn't buy a paper today, either. Damn it all . . . Hey!" He sat up straight on the couch. "Maybe it'll be on the afternoon newscast, huh?"

Without awaiting an answer, Harry crossed to the TV and turned it on. "What time is it, Mar?"

"About twenty-five to five," she said.

"Swell!" Harry exulted, snapping on the set. "I can catch the pro football review on CBS. Five minutes late, but I should catch the scores, anyways . . ."

The picture formed on the tube, and Harry crouched before the set to watch newsreels of yesterday's game. After a few second's close ob-

servation, he arose in disgust. "Damn!"

"Wrong game?" Marsha asked, unable to see the screen beyond Harry's body.

"No, it's the damned half-time entertainment. I wish the newsreels would stick to the *important* part of the sport, and skip those silly band formations." He glowered at the screen, on which white-garbed band members simultaneously played "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee" and imitated poorly a Mississippi steamboat, paddle wheel and all.

"I think it's rather clever," Marsha said. "Some people go to the game just to see those—"

She halted, as Harry impatiently tried to shush her in order to hear the announcer's voice, as his face appeared on the tube in place of the gambling musicians. "Quiet, *quiet!*"

"... for a rout of eighteen to thirteen," the man said, smiling in a Pepsodent way.

"In whose *favor*, damn it!?" Harry growled at the machine.

But the announcer was already narrating a sort of seaborne girly show from Coral Gables, where underclad bathing beauties did handstands and flips on skimming aquaplanes.

"Phooey!" Harry muttered, and snapped off the set.

"Sorry, dear," said Marsha, contritely.

"Hell, it's not your fault," Harry said. He got back on the couch again, and tried to doze off. But sleep, though every nerve in his body cried for it, wouldn't come. There was something bothering him.

The only trouble was, he couldn't place the feeling of uncomfortable discontent in his mind. He lay awake a full hour, trying to pinpoint the source of his aggravation, before he finally collapsed into fitful slumber.

The next day, Monday, Harry was disappointed to find that Paul Carson was off duty. In his place, overseeing the bored guardsmen, was a stringbean of a martinet, a green young second lieutenant named Robie Rawlins. He was about six feet tall, couldn't have weighed more than one hundred forty pounds, and had a gaunt face that looked like an irritated death'shead.

"Captain Coyne, sir!" he greeted Harry, snapping to full attention and throwing a forearm-quivering salute. Harry, in view of regulations, had to do the same back to him. Protocol accomplished, Harry sat down in the canvas

chair, and tried to get oriented, though he knew there wouldn't be any change, or he'd have heard about it just by keeping his ears open on the subway ride downtown.

"Don't suppose our alien has shown his face again?"

"No, sir," said Rawlins, taking a sheaf of stapled papers from the table, and handing them to Harry. "I have here a full report of the night's activities."

Harry stared at the heavy manuscript, blinking. "What the hell did you write about, if nothing happened?"

Rawlins, going a bit pale at Harry's unmilitary manner, replied stiffly, "Changing of the guards, rifle inspection, and the report from the corporal of the guard. Which was, by the way, negative."

Harry had half a mind to snap at the man, then decided to simply forget it. In his own red-tapish way, Rawlins was merely trying to do his duty as he saw it. It took all kinds to make up an army. Harry sighed, and thanked Rawlins, promising to read the report later, though he had absolutely no intention of going near it again.

"Are you off duty now, Lieutenant?" he asked, hopefully.

". . . Officially, yes, but—

Well, I'll stay on, if you like, sir. Give you someone to talk to . . ."

Harry hesitated, on the point of ordering Rawlins to go, then simply said, "Suit yourself." The day's outlook was pretty glum. He fished in his uniform for a cigarette, found one, and smoked it slowly, in silence.

After about five minutes, Rawlins spoke up.

"Sir—I was wondering . . ."

"Yes?"

"Well, I'd think—under the circumstances, that part of our problem here would be to fend off curious civilians. I expected vast crowds of sensation-seekers down here at the park. But so far, there's been no one."

Harry grinned wryly. "People are strange creatures, Rawlins. If there were vague rumors, possible threats, that sort of thing, we'd have a city-wide panic on our hands. But this is different. Nothing in the least vague about it. The alien has given an unmistakable ultimatum, one that is well nigh impossible to disbelieve. Therefore, people stay away so as to be able to not believe it."

Rawlins stared. "How's that again, sir?"

"It's a psychological para-

dox," Harry explained. "When there's a possible danger, people react in the form of panic. It's the not knowing that's so frightening. But when the danger is real, and positively guaranteed, a sort of calm settles over them. As in London, during World War II. The citizens, once they knew bomb threats were actual, once their homes and factories were really being systematically reduced to rubble, they got almost blasé about it. Went to work, out on dates, holidays by the seashore, as if nothing was wrong at all. Once you know you *can't* fight, you—well—you just *don't*."

"I don't see how they can simply put it out of their minds—" Rawlins said, his face working nervously.

"It's not easy, but they do it. An attitude of let's-pretend-it's - not - there - and - maybe - it'll-go-away. Plus an incorrigible optimism, indigenous to Americans, that at the last minute Superman, the U. S. Cavalry, or Davy Crockett is going to make everything come out all right."

"What do you think we can do, sir?" Rawlins asked.

"I don't know about you," Harry said thoughtfully, "but I've already given serious thought to resigning my commission. If this is the end, I'd

like to spend the last few days with my wife, instead of getting calluses on my behind down here."

Rawlins gave him a look of pure horror, as though Harry had heaved a rock at the statue of Liberty. "Resign—?" he croaked. "At a time like this?"

"I can't think of a better, offhand," Harry said. "And don't look so shocked. If there were something *wrong* with resigning a commission, rest assured the Army would forbid it."

"B-but—" Rawlins faltered.

"Oh, relax, Rawlins," Harry said irritably. "I haven't decided *yet*! I merely said I was thinking of it. I'm going to hang on awhile, till I've assured myself that defense against this alien is hopeless."

Rawlins, a little comforted, relaxed, as ordered. "A—a lot can happen in the remainder of our month's allotment," he said, slowly.

"Sure," said Harry, with no conviction. "Sure it can."

They sat there a few moments longer, then Rawlins, unable to think of anything else worth saying, suddenly got up. "Sir . . . I believe I'll go off duty after all."

Harry, much relieved, stood up, went through the saluting

formalities, and regained his chair happily as the door closed behind the lieutenant.

He stared at the dull metal wall of the quonset, trying to think. Something was very definitely bugging him.

One month, he thought. One lousy month. The alien must *know* we can't evacuate the planet that quickly. Yet he gave us a month to do it in. *If* he knows our inability to comply with his demand—Then why the hell didn't he and the others simply come down and take over? Why this *avant-garde* spokesman? The more Harry thought about it, the less sense it made.

How about defenses? he went on in his mind. Fission was their most potent weapon, but also the trickiest to employ. So damned many unpleasant side-effects, what with fallout, radiation, area of blast—They'd use it only as a final resource, he felt.

Oh, there'd been suggestions aplenty, from all over the world. Military strategists through common civilians had sent all sorts of recommendations to the Pentagon, where nearly all were discarded. Some of them showed imagination, but were impractical for various reasons.

There was the housewife from Denver, who had written

that if they waited till night, "when the monster is asleep"—Harry chuckled at her ingenious assumption of this as a fact—they could jack the vessels up, and slip the whole structure into the bay, where—upon the alien would drown when he attempted to come out.

A noted Russian scientist had suggested running high voltage through the structure, certain death to any creature with an Earth-type nervous system. Very little stood in the way of that suggestion, except that (1) they had no way of knowing if his system was Earth-type, (2) it would take more than a month to build a dynamo capable of generating an amount sufficient from death of one so huge, and (3) Doctor Freid had reported that the alloy was a non-conductor.

The best idea so far was from a Parisian chef, who asked why the individual vessels were not simply separated, giving the alien no chance to reassemble, or whatever it was he did. This had almost been tried, until it was found that the vessels stacked seamlessly, apparently linking molecules at points of contact, and resisting all efforts to budge them a fraction apart.

And, of course, none of the suggestions covered the really important detail: What was to be done when the *others* arrived? How *many* others were there? Even a few dozen would be beyond Earth's capacity for defense.

Harry sighed, and got up, deciding to take a stroll about the area. It wouldn't accomplish anything, but it'd stop him from fruitless brain-searching, which was beginning to give him a pounding headache.

The air outside was chilly, even for autumn, and Harry could see his breath spurting in small clouds before him as he started his disinterested tour of inspection.

He studiously avoided looking toward any of the semi-circle of enlisted men as he made his roundabout promenade, thus avoiding the necessity of returning their salutes, if indeed any of them made any, with him a good twenty feet within their perimeter. He kept his eye on the cupric eyesore that glinted dully in the autumn sunlight in the Park, its lack of verdigris almost an open affront to the Statue of Liberty out in the bay.

Overhead, a scrambled squadron of gulls soared on

motionless wings, seemingly about to crash head-on with one another, but always just missing such cranial disaster by a tilted feather or two. Wings had always fascinated Harry. He marveled at the design and function of feathers, which could work in unison or separately to give the wing itself the desired shape or form.

Harry was just watching the gulls and musing on this aerodynamic aspect of theirs, when a mind's-eye picture of the alien came back to him. With a small adrenalinic shock, he recalled the faceted eyes, the lumpy hair, corduroy outfit, and seemingly alligator boots. And then he thought of those band formations at the football game's half-time, with all the separate musicians functioning as a unit, a steamboat . . .

"Holy hell!" Harry cried. "I've got it!"

And that's when a small section of the coppery tower slid open, halfway to the summit, and a pulsing pink ray flipped out and snatched him bodily into the stack of alien vessels, almost as swiftly as a toad's tongue snaps up a passing grub.

"So," said Harry, as his eyes adjusted to the soft red-

dish lighting within the alien tower, "I was right. How many of you are there, anyhow?"

The answer came back instantly, filtering into his mind without bothering to use his ears as a medium of contact.

"One million, three hundred forty-two," said the voice in his mind.

Harry, floating weightlessly, ten stories from the bottom of the interior, shivered a little as he eyed the dancing, bobbing little spheres that were the aliens. Their reply left him feeling very much outnumbered. "Are you—are you *all* answering me at once?" he asked. "Or do you have an ambassador of sorts?"

"We all function as one, Harold Coyne. It is our way of life. It has been for many hundred generations."

"I wonder," said Harry, avoiding downward glances at the ghastly drop beneath his feet, "if you could set me down at ground-level? This no-gravity feeling is scaring the hell out of me."

"It is not necessary," said the voiceless voice, and the next instant, the wall of the cylinder behind him began to stretch, contort and extend, and Harry found himself seated on a metal replica of his armchair back home, one that

even duplicated a small hole Harry'd inadvertently made with a cigarette, not a week before. "What is a ping-pong ball?"

Harry opened his mouth to reply, but the voice said, "Just *think* the answer, please. Your words slow down your thought processes."

Harry obligingly—if a little puzzledly—thought hard of a synthesis of all that was ping-pong-ballish. The size, weight, resilience, shape, and use flashed through his mind in an instant's concentration.

"Oh!" said the voice.

"Oh *what*?" Harry demanded, feeling frustrated.

"Oh, so that's what one is," the voice continued. "Some portion of your mind had made the observation that we each looked like a ping-pong ball. We merely ascertained that to which we had been compared."

"I see," said Harry, who didn't quite. "Well . . . uh . . . what do you want with me?"

"It's not that we want you in here," the imperturbable mental words continued. "It's just that we can no longer permit you to remain out there."

"Why not?" Harry asked.

"Because you have guessed our secret. Yes, you were perfectly right. There is no 'giant

alien'. That was a composite of all of us, functioning as a unit, each assuming the proper spectrum tone to give the 'giant' his various shades of color. The voice that you heard, of course, was controlled use of the air molecules before the pseudo-mouth. We could have used telepathy, but that was too near our actual nature, so we preferred actual sonic waves. Made a rather nice echo, as we recall."

"Lovely," Harry agreed swiftly, hoping politeness might soften the brunt of any danger he might be in. "Is it true about the others, then? You lied—that is—you, uh, distorted the truth once; can I assume this was another—hmmm—ruse?"

"Truly you are sagacious, Harold Coyne. Yes, there are no more of us. We are the population, *in toto*, of an Earth-type planet that was formerly revolving about Vega."

"Formerly?" said Harry.

"It is gone," said the voice.

"Aw—aw shucks!" said Harry, as sympathetically as he could manage. "What a lousy break."

An image formed in his mind of a sort of splintered surface, alive with maggots. "Lousy break?" said the voice.

"Uh . . . unfortunate oc-

currence," said Harry, quickly.

"Oh!" said the voice. "An idiom. They trouble us."

"Well, then maybe I better steer clear of them," said Harry. "*—avoid using them!*" he added, before the question could come at him. "But look," he went on. "If you people can control air molecules the way you did with the giant's voice, and metallic molecules, like when you jerrybuilt me this armchair—And if you're each tinier than a grapefruit—Why have us clear off the planet?"

"Oh, we have no intention of actually having the Earth-people depart. That was merely a defensive strategem."

"Then what the hell—?" Harry choked.

"Shall we tell you a story?" asked the voice.

Harry groaned. "Why not?" he muttered. "Shoot— That is, go ahead . . . I mean: Tell it."

Well (said the voice in his mind), the Orbics—that's us—used to have limbs for locomotion, organs for observing light, and sound, and all the other appurtenances that you people have. We didn't *look* much like you, of course, but functionally, we were on a par with Earthmen. But we slow-

ly came to realize that Intellect was the most important part of existence, and, as our minds developed more and more—we had to work at it, but develop they did—and gained more and more control over the physical world, our bodies grew less and less utilitarian. And so we gradually—Oh, you know, Harold Coyne! It's an ancient theme in your science-fiction stories on Earth. Anyhow, to make a long evolution short—We became almost all mind, and hardly any body. But we were forced to retain a few physical properties, such as a need for oxygen atmosphere, because we couldn't keep our brains alive without the stuff. It was a nuisance, but there it was. Well, with the loss of our bodies, we also lost out on reproduction— But everything has a price, we guess . . . Though it did eliminate domestic squabbles—

Where were we?

Oh, yes— Anyhow, our population, while no longer subject to the ravages of old age, had to take precautions to remain even static. Some unit was forever getting struck by lightning, or gobbled up by a skrantch—

(Harry had a briefly sickening vision of a sort of fanged boulder, with an insatiable ap-

petite and a hopeless lack of table manners.)

—and our population started dwindling badly. In desperation, we united, linked minds across the planetary surface to act as a single thinking being, gave storm warnings, skrantch bulletins, and—anyhow, after that, we stayed at our present number, one million, three hundred forty-two. But that's when the comet came.

"What comet?" asked Harry, enthralled by the tale.

The one that destroyed *our* planet. We don't have a word for it, really. We called it "Earth", too, in our language. Oh well. Anyhow—we spotted it a few million miles out, and knew we'd have to evacuate. It was sad, but necessary. So we made the ships, twenty-five of them, and—

"How come twenty-five?" Harry asked.

Comfort plus economy of materials plus performance. It gave us roughly forty thousand per ship, which was just about right for running the ship, plus having enough air on board to survive the journey here.

"How come no oxygen tanks?"

We don't breathe that often. Maybe once a week, by your calendar. But when we need

it, we need it fast, or we snuff out. So we came here to settle. And— Well, that's about it, Harold Coyne.

The voice ceased its story, and a heavy mental silence fell in Harry's brain. He sat there, hoping for more, but nothing else came.

"I don't get it," he said, finally. "Then why all the messing around with a fake giant, and an ultimatum to get out, and— Say, are you really atomic-proof?"

"Which question shall we answer first?"

"Either one."

"Very well. The second first. No, not really. That was another ruse."

"If you're such hot stuff, how come all these ruses?"

"To be blunt: We're afraid of Earthmen. We had to do something. The next nearest planet with the proper atmosphere is so far that even oxygen tanks might give out en route. So, like it or not, we had to come here."

"But what are you scared of?" Harry said, doggedly.

"You have people—of your own race, mind you—who have difficulties living here, do you not? Just because of superficial differences? Silly things like skin color, point of geographic origin, and lan-

guage? Well, then, how about us? If *unimportant* differences cause Earthmen to hate and make war on others, what are *our* chances for survival? Do you see?"

"Oh. Oh, yeah. I do," said Harry, slightly ashamed of his species. "I—"

He stopped himself abruptly, just short of voicing the thought, but it had already entered his head, and therefore their heads, too.

"You wonder why we do not simply use our powers to obliterate you," said the voice. Harry winced, hoping he hadn't given them ideas. "Don't be afraid. We can't. You see, destruction is unintelligent, and we, being nearly pure intellect—" It left the thought unfinished. Harry got the point.

"So— So why the giant, then?" he asked.

"Well, it's this way, Harold Coyne. Though we function as one mental being, we are fond, individually, of our parts. Should we have made the attempt to merely go zooming out of our ships on reaching Earth's atmosphere, we feared that a stray rocket or so would have destroyed some of us. We are, you recall, irreplaceable, once we're destroyed. So, sensing that the men outside were not hostile,

merely wary, we decided to blend into a recognizable shape—if a bit large—to ease some of the tension at our appearance. Your soldiers would be less likely to open fire on a man-shape than upon something which looked like a group of ping-pong balls."

"That's true," Harry said. "But why one *big* man? Why not a lot of normal-sized ones?"

The voice, in his mind, went tsk-tsk. "You are already forgetting that which led you to guess our deception: Our nubbly appearance. Rough complexion, 'alligator' boots, and so on. That was because we cannot contract our already absolute minimum bodies. In a single large size, the lumpy surface appearance was not so noticeable as in a group of single men. Even with our intellect, we cannot make a recognizably human face out of objects the size of ping-pong balls."

"Neither could I," Harry offered, sensing their slight feeling of inadequacy. "But—" he pursued, "what was your long-range plan? You'd have to come out at the end of the month, wouldn't you?"

"Well, actually, we'd planned on *sneaking* out, when no one was watching. It was—to

use an Earth idiom—a lousy scheme, at best. What with the sunlight by day, the searchlights at night, and soldiers everywhere, we couldn't have sneaked out a—a—"

"A pinhead?" Harry suggested.

"Thank you. —a pinhead, let alone something *our* size. So here we are. We seem to be stuck."

"Maybe," said Harry, trying to be offhand about it, "Maybe *I* can help you."

"You?" scoffed the voice. "Why, your mind tells us that you're a relative *nobody* on Earth, Harold Coyne."

"Oh, yeah?" said Harry. "Then you don't know Earth-people very well. How long have I been in here?"

"About an hour . . ."

"Ha!" said Harry. "Then by now, the entire planet knows that I've been snatched by the alien giant! My plight is being discussed in every medium of communication on the Earth! Why, my picture will probably—" his face took on an almost holy light of anticipation "—will probably be on the cover of *Life Magazine*!"

"We still are without comprehension, Harold Coyne."

"Oh. Well, let me explain. The idea is, with the whole

world anxiously awaiting news of me that when I emerge—you *will* let me emerge, won't you?"

"If it is compatible with our safety, of course."

"Oh, it is. Very much so. In fact, it's necessary to your safety."

"Kindly elucidate."

"Well, when I emerge, what with all the worry and the anxiety outside, all at once I'll be mobbed by reporters, all anxious for my first statement after being held captive by an alien. The whole world will hear whatever I say at that moment."

"While this is incomprehensible to us, we see in your mind that it is the truth as you know it, and extremely likely that it is the truth as it is . . . Ah, yes! It *is* as you say. We detect a strong pulsing of eager, violent minds—What is a deadline?"

"Reporters, huh? Oh, a deadline is the time beyond which it is useless to turn in an article for a certain issuing of the paper—Damn! You've got me talking like *you* guys, now!"

"Very well, Harold Coyne. We detect your honesty in dealing with us. We find that the world is indeed awaiting word of you. What we do not

know is what you plan to say, when we permit you to emerge."

"Well, first of all, I'd like to have the President of the United States out there."

"Why?"

"I always wanted to meet him, for one thing. But also, he's in a good position to make a statement to the world that will carry some weight. My popularity is a nine-days' wonder. But he's got some time left in office yet. People will listen to him."

There was a pause, as the composite mind surrounding him digested this information. Then, "Why can we not detect your full plan, Harold Coyne? By the set of your mind, we know you *have* a plan, something that reflects mutual benefit for Earthmen and Orbits— But what it is we cannot see."

"That's because I haven't formulated it, yet," Harry said. "Just as a man, about to go out onto a deserted night street in a tough area of a city has only the feeling of apprehension in his mind. If he pauses and thinks, he finds a succession of thoughts of tall dark strangers with a variety of weapons, and so on. But he has only the *general* worry, to begin with."

"Hmmm . . ." said the mind,

the first non-positive thought Harry had received. "All we detect is that you wish to use our powers in conjunction with your world's physical endowments in order to make some sort of political coup. Could you elucidate?"

"Soon's I see the President," said Harry, deliberately keeping his mind from enlarging on his scheme. "He'll have to be here, because he can give orders. I can only make suggestions."

The inner voice seemed to give a kind of neural sigh. "Very well, Harold Coyne. We shall arrange it."

Three hours later, the President was standing outside the alien structure, brought there by jet after receiving an anonymous order out of empty air before his desk that his presence was necessary to the solution of the problem of the alien on American shores. He looked, as Harry watched him through the relayed awareness of the aliens, a little bit shaky, even though surrounded by a cordon of grim-faced Secret Service guards, with drawn pistols.

"Shall we bring him in, or will you go out?" asked the voice.

"Whatever's easiest," said Harry, reclining comfortably

in his coppery armchair, ten stories above the base of the stacked vessels.

A second later, he heard the shouts outside the opening which had appeared in the wall before him, and watched with fascination as a pink ray lifted the President of the United States inside, to bob helplessly in midair as the gap sealed itself behind him.

"Here, now," said Harry. "That's no way to treat our top executive. Give him a chair, for pete's sake!"

Soundlessly, another cupric extrusion blossomed beside Harry on the wall, and the President was lofted gently into place upon it.

"Hello, sir," Harry said respectfully. "Captain Harold Coyne is who I am."

"A pleasure," said the President, recovering his dignity quickly. "Are we prisoners?"

"No, sir. I just needed your help, that's all."

"I see," said the President, able to grasp at least that much. "But where's the giant?"

"All over us," Harry said, and proceeded to explain the facts of the situation. When he finished, the President looked positively elated.

"Fine work, Captain!" he exclaimed. "You should have

been a diplomat. Touchy business, dealing with aliens. But you've handled things admirably. Now, tell me, what's this plan of yours?"

"Well, the way I see it, sir, we and the aliens have one thing in common: we want peace, right?"

"True. Quite so," said the President.

"However, the aliens' worry is a more direct one; they dread having people take potshots at them. They *do* look a bit too much like those glass balls that dance on water jets in shooting galleries. Our worry, of course, is that mankind will get all riled up some day soon, and destroy itself."

"Pity 'tis, 'tis true," said the President, who had once played a pretty good Polonius back in high school.

"So I've figured out a combination, see," Harry went on, eagerly, "whereby we exchange them a bit of information for a bit of work."

"Sounds — uh — reasonable, I guess." The President paused, then, "What information did you have in mind?"

"Why, the formula for steel, of course," said Harry. "These aliens have intelligence, but alloys depend on luck and discovery. That's why they use these poor coppery vessels, sir. No one ever

figured out how to make steel. And iron, of course, wears out and rusts."

"Mmmph," said the President, digesting this. "Uh—Why do we give them the—I mean, what use can they possibly—?"

"Jackets," said Harry, as though it were obvious. "If each of them wears a protective steel jacket, a potshot can't injure them at all, see?"

"But why not?" the President argued. "Certain bullets can penetrate steel..."

"Not when it's floating in midair. All a bullet could do would be to knock it out of line-of-flight for a moment. And the very shape of a sphere tends to make it resilient, and nearly impossible to shatter."

"Excuse us, Harold Coyne, but aren't you forgetting that we Orbics function as a unit? If we desired individual coverings, we'd have come in one million, three hundred forty-two separate globes."

"That's just your trouble, tired thinking," said Harry. "You're not circling Vega now, you're on Earth, and in America, where the rights of the Individual are paramount!"

He shut his eyes and thought hard, patriotically, letting his thoughts flip from

the Spirit of '76 up to the election of 1964.

"We begin to comprehend," said the voice. "Yes, we *have* thought more of the group than the individual. We shall change our thinking at once."

"Good," said Harry. "Then it's all settled."

"Wait!" said the President. "We give them the formula, fine. What do we get back?"

"World peace," Harry said. "As soon as each is coated protectively in steel—and don't forget to leave airholes for breathing, you guys—they take off and spread about the planet, all of them. They link to one another mentally, and become our new International Police Force. You see, sir, they read minds. In this way, no one can possibly commit even a tiny little old misdemeanor undetected, let alone perpetrate a *war*!"

"Excuse us again," said the voice, "but what rule could we apply in order to know what was right or wrong? Our sense of morality may differ from yours, and we wouldn't want to infringe..."

"Oh, that should be easy enough," said Harry. "After all, the simplest solutions are the best... How about just leaving it at this: Don't let anybody get away with any-

thing that will impinge on the rights of anybody else? It's more or less a paraphrase of the Golden Rule, but it should cover the situation."

"That seems reasonable," said the voice. "Allow us a moment to confer."

In the silence that ensued, Harry turned to the President. "What do you think, sir?"

"Fine. Fine plan. Splendid solution. I am in favor of it. Nothing like a peaceful world."

"Not so far, anyhow," said Harry.

The aliens made contact again.

"We are agreeable. Consider it done. Now, when do we learn the formula for steel?"

"Any time you want," said Harry. "Just tune in on the mind of any physics teacher at New York University. It's just slightly northwest of where we are now. The formula is not a secret one. They should each of them know it."

A long pause ensued, while they dredged the scientific minds at the university. They made contact once more, after a minute.

"It is all in readiness, Harold Coyne. Already, from a large mill in Pennsylvania, steel is flying here by mental

energy, to make us our new jackets."

"You *stole* it?" the President gasped.

"We left something called an I.O.U. Harold Coyne's mind is convinced that this is next best to legal tender."

"Oh well, what's a little steel!" sighed the President. "Come on, Captain Coyne, let's get out of this place."

"May we?" Harry asked the aliens.

"Yes, now that all is settled. Rest assured we will keep our end of the bargain to the letter."

Harry felt a warm glow of accomplishment as he and the President were suddenly floated out the open side of the structure on that pink ray, and gently deposited on the grass before a cluster of soldiers, reporters, and mobile TV units.

"Friends—" said the President, "I have an announcement to make . . ."

Marsha, who had fainted when first she heard on the TV that her husband had been snatched up by the 'alien giant', was pretty well self-controlled, thanks to the kind assistance of a neighbor with a bowl of hot chicken broth, when the next announcement came over the set. She'd sat

there for four hours, waiting news of her Harry.

And then it came.

Marsha sat bolt upright on the sofa, staring at the screen. There was Harry, and beside him was the President! And he had his arm across Harry's shoulders!

A thrill of pride started Marsha's heart beating wildly in her breast. My man! she cried within herself. Proudly, she listened to the President's speech.

"... greatest day in the world's history. We all owe a vote of thanks to Harry Coyne, captain in the New York National Guard, whose ingenious thinking has set the world upon its legs at last, freed forever from fear of war, or even minor crimes..."

An uncomfortable knot began to tie itself in Marsha's aorta as she listened. Her Harry, making a decision that influenced the world? Heaven help the world!

"... as he said to me inside that alien vessel—'... after all, the simplest solutions are the best...'"

Marsha stiffened. As of its own volition, her head turned about. She looked toward the kitchen door, then toward the cookbook... "Oh, no," she breathed. "Not one of *Harry's*

solutions! Not that! Good grief, not *that*!"

It was too much to be borne. Marsha fainted again.

Things took a few days to get started. The aliens, who were a naturally neat race, generously took upon themselves the task of removing the stack of spaceships from Battery Park, and storing them in a special wing of the Smithsonian Institution for posterity to enjoy. Although posterity, thanks to the new steel jackets, would undoubtedly be enjoying the aliens themselves. Only then did they start work on the ingots of steel they'd left piled in the park while they cleaned up their mess.

And a small argument broke out then, with the individual aliens debating whether it were better to make all identical jackets, as "police uniforms," or dissimilar ones, as befitted their importance as individuals. They finally decided on similar shapes, but different colors, ending up looking—before they all took off for their 'round-the-world duty stations—like nothing so much as an explosion in a billiard ball factory. Every color, every stripe, polka dot, geometric design possible was employed

on the individual Orbics. For a change, Paramount News even made up a special reel in Technicolor, of the takeoff flight. There was a band playing, and a cheering crowd, and flags, and—oh, all the fixings for a swell send-off.

The mayor's wife, a little confused, had shown up with a bottle of champagne, as had the President's lady, and both got into a lively discussion about who had the better right to launch whatever it was that was to be launched. The aliens finally solved the dilemma—since there was nothing but an individual alien that they could strike at with their magnums—by having the two ladies stand two paces apart, and swing the two bottles together in a glorious crash of glass, foam, and golden wine.

It was photographed by all photographers present, and each tried to submit it for Picture of the Year. However, this award was won by a small boy with a brownie camera, who happened to photograph the First Lady while two aliens bobbed before her face, just on either side of the bridge of her nose. His title: "First Lady with BEM Blood?", was appreciated only by science-fiction fans, all of

whom were claiming also that they'd known the aliens were friendly all along.

The ceremony passed. The crowds departed. Everybody went home tired but happy, as the aliens skimmed to their relative satellite positions above the earth, at a height of about half a mile. (They'd given their word to keep out of the way of airliners and such, of course.)

Peace had come at last, people felt.

They felt this way for about one hour after the launching ceremony . . .

Harry and Marsha were on the sofa, smooching, as even old married couples will. Marsha had finally put aside her trepidations about Harry's interference with the world. It could be, she convinced herself, that for once one of his ideas doesn't have side-effects worse than the original problem. After all, he *had* taped the cookbook page in place again, and he *had* brought the kitchen door back when she'd complained— Perhaps Harry had finally wised up and suggested the right action.

Breaking laughingly from a gruffly amorous clinch, Marsha jumped up from Harry's lap and started for the kitchen. "If we're going to carry on this way," she called back over

her shoulder, "I'm going to need sustenance."

"Aw, c'mere!" Harry said, too comfortable to chase her.

"In a minute," she said. "First, I have a date with a cold chicken leg."

Harry shrugged, and settled deeper into the sofa cushions. Then he found himself leaping, startled, to his feet, as a booming voice came from the kitchen.

"HALT!" the crashing sound said.

Harry heard a clattering crunch, as the chicken platter dropped from Marsha's hands. He dashed out to find her cowering against the kitchen wall, staring wildly into the empty space over the kitchen table.

"H-Harry," she gasped. "A voice! Right out of the air!"

"It must be one of the aliens," he said, bewildered. "Uh—" Harry felt silly addressing the air, but there seemed nothing else to do. "Uh—what's up?"

"Your wife was about to partake of that cold fowl's left leg," said the voice. "In her mind, she was fully aware of the fact that she had already, yesterday, partaken of that same fowl's right leg."

"S-so what?" said Harry, when the voice stayed silent for a few moments.

"As man and wife, each of you has a right to half the chicken. If your wife has both legs, it is an infringement on your rights."

Harry gawked at the air before his face. "But I don't *like* the legs!" he protested. "I take the wings, instead."

"That is unequal distribution," said the voice.

"All right, all right," said Harry. "I *relinquish* my right! Will that satisfy you?"

"No," said the voice. "I am sworn to uphold your rights. You do not know what is best for you, apparently."

"*What!?!?*" Harry squawked. "But that's silly! What would you do if Marsha made chicken *soup* out of the bird? How'd you know whether we were getting our equal share of leg- or wing-broth, eh?"

"I would know," said the voice. Harry had a sinking feeling that it *would*, too.

"But—" he pleaded.

"Harold Coyne, either you eat the chicken leg, or no one shall. I shall utilize mental energy to build a force barrier about it, through which none but your teeth can pass."

"You're nuts!" Harry roared. "A force-barrier around a *chicken leg*?"

"I am only doing my duty as I see it," said the voice. Abruptly, the sense of *presence*

was gone, and Harry knew that he and Marsha were alone again. He turned to her. She was staring at him with narrowed eyes, a funny set to her mouth.

"... Mar?" he said, after a nervous moment.

"I might have known, Harry Coyne," she whispered, her aspirates harsh with frustrated rage. "I could have even *predicted* this sorry mess!" Her voice slowly grew louder, as she warmed to her topic. "And *we* only have a *chicken*! We're a *lucky* family, by comparison. Can you imagine some poor housewife trying to get perfectly equal distribution of *pork chops*? And what about the short-order cooks in restaurants, going crazy trying to measure pancake batter to the *drop*!"

Harry, his face white and perspiring, tried to think of a rebuttal, and couldn't. "Aw ... Aw, Mar—" he muttered.

"Don't aw-Mar *me*!" she shrieked. "Get your damned barrier-proof teeth over there and eat that precious chicken leg!"

"But I *hate* the leg!" Harry cried, piteously.

"You're eating that leg if I have to force-feed you!" she said, snatching up the cold drumstick and advancing upon

his quivering hulk in the corner, like Lady Macbeth nearing the bedside of the king.

"HALT!" came a voice.

Marsha let the drumstick fall to the linoleum, and sprang with a screaming whimper into Harry's arms. "It's him again!" she gasped, wide-eyed and trembling.

"Marsha Coyne, you are infringing on the right of your husband to refuse sustenance until such time as he deems it necessary!" the voice declared loudly.

Marsha shook her head, confused. "But you just said—"

"Hold it, Mar," said Harry, whose sojourn with the aliens in the tower had given him slightly greater awareness of their minor differences. "Ye gods, I believe this is another one!"

"Of course!" the voice said, snappishly. "How can we possibly patrol the planet unless we keep in motion at all times? The officer you refer to has already passed out of this district—we've divided Earth into one million three hundred forty-two precincts, you know—"

"I *didn't* know—" Harry murmured, but the voice went on.

"So this is my district for the next ten minutes. The way I see it, if he doesn't want the

chicken leg, you have no right to force it upon him."

There was a sudden hollow feeling in their heads, and the alien voice was gone.

Marsha, the terror past, made no move to leave her tightly snuggled position within Harry's arms.

"This is even worse," she said, her voice flat and toneless with the beginnings of horror. "If each of the aliens interprets the law in his own way— There'll be chaos!"

"I guess—I guess we *should* have another conference, maybe, Harry agreed slowly. "To clear up this little misunderstanding."

The phone jangled harshly, almost as if the operator had somehow been able to turn up its volume. Harry stepped into the living room and snatched it up. "Hello?"

"Captain Coyne?" came an anguished voice. "This is the President!"

"Oh, how are you sir!" Harry said smartly.

"*Miserable*, you dunder-head!" screamed the chief executive. "I can't take a bath! Did you hear me? I, the President, have been *ousted* from the White House john!"

"B-b-b-but *why*, sir?" Harry squeaked.

"Because if I take a hot bath, there won't be enough

water left in the heater for my *wife*! That's why!"

The President sounded near to tears. "I've had a long day at the office, and I'm *rancid* with sweat, but this voice in midair *roared* at me, when I tried turning on the faucet!"

"Uh . . ." said Harry.

"So I said, 'Don't be silly. My wife doesn't need a bath', and the voice said, 'The *hell* she doesn't!'"

"Uh . . ." said Harry.

"Damn it to perdition, Captain," the President said, weeping openly at last, "I had to have one of the White House staff place this stupid *phone call* for me!"

"Place the *call*—?" Harry gargled. "But why, sir?"

"Because I've overshot my *allotment*, you jerk! These bobbing numbskulls have decided that no one can make any more phone calls than anyone else. According to them, I can't make any more phone calls until September of 1989!"

"You—you could write letters . . ." Harry ventured.

"*Arghhhh!*" said the President. "Listen, you got us into this, and it's up to you to get us *out*! Now you better do some thinking, and some damned *fine* thinking, *fast*, before I send a stratojet over

your home with a payload of H-bombs!"

"Excuse me," said a strange voice on the line, "but such an action would interfere with Coyne's right to live out his allotted span of years, which may—"

"Oh, no!" the President screamed. "No, no, no, no, no . . ."

"... Sir?" Harry said, after a pause.

Nothing came to his ears but muffled sobs. Feeling a bit wrung out he gently replaced the receiver.

"You heard?" he said to Marsha.

"He was shouting quite loud enough for the whole neighborhood to hear," she remarked. "Well, Harry? What can we do?"

He stared at her, then smiled. "You said 'we' . . ." he said softly, cautiously, hopefully . . .

Marsha came into his arms and laid her head against his chest. "You're a boob, Harry Coyne," she sighed, "but you are all I've got."

"I beg to differ," came a voice from the room's center. "Having investigated the marital status of individuals in this precinct, I find that it contains more unmarried men than women. This deficiency

has been taken care of, and your three other husbands are even now on their way here, to share in your happily married life."

"Harry!" Marsha cried. "He doesn't mean it?"

The doorbell rang, loudly.

"Oh, yes, he does," Harry said, rushing to the door and putting on the sturdy iron night-bolt. "Stay out of here, you lechers!" he shouted. "She is mine, all mine!"

"We can't!" male voices yelled back. "We're being forced! Something's dragging at our neckties!"

Almost before Harry spotted it, the night-bolt started to slide back. "Oh, no, you don't!" he snarled, grappling with the small metal knob and slamming the bolt home again.

"Harold Coyne, you are interfering with these men's right to have a mate!" boomed the alien voice.

"They are interfering with *my* right to have some privacy!" Harry hollered back, fighting the bolt with all his strength.

"Marriage is more important than privacy," said the voice. The bolt started shooting open.

"A man's home is his castle!" Harry cried in desperation, slamming the thing home again.

"Mercy, mercy!" pleaded the men outside. "We're choking to death!" Harry could hear the strangled tones due to the pull on their neckties.

"No," he said hoarsely, straining to fight the bolt's egress from the slot, a losing battle as the alien concentrated. "You can't come in. She's *my* wife, damn it!"

Marsha helpfully put her tiny hands upon his own and helped him hold the bolt in place. "Go away!" she trilled.

"We'd *love* to!" came the chorus. "But how?"

"Look," Harry said toward the alien voice's locale, "why not just forget the whole bargain and go away? We don't *want* you to police the world anymore. You're wrecking our lives!"

"We would, Harry Coyne," said the implacable alien, "but to obey such a suggestion would infringe on *our* rights as policemen."

"Oh, no, no, no!" Harry wept helplessly. "This is a nightmare!"

"If you'll excuse me," said the alien, "I'm due in the next precinct, now." The *presence* vanished, and the bolt lay lifeless in its slot once more.

"What happened?" said one of the men outside.

"New cop on duty," said

Harry. "You guys better scram while you have the chance."

That they took his suggestion quickly was evinced by the sudden thundering of feet in the outside hall, then on the stairs, then gone through the front door.

"Whew," Harry mopped numbly at his forehead. "We have got to get rid of them. I can't take much more, honey."

"Harry," said Marsha, suddenly. "I've got an idea!"

"What idea?" Harry asked.

"I know how to get rid of them!" she said. "It's got to work. It's our only chance."

"Tell me, quick!" Harry demanded.

"Well, that's the trouble. I don't have the main point, just the main idea. All we have to do to get rid of them is to get them to fight amongst themselves, see? Let them pick each other off."

"And you need . . . ?" Harry said, eagerly.

"A subject for them to fight about," said Marsha.

Harry snapped his fingers. "*Got it!*" he cried. "*Quick*, honey, do we have any liquor left from our last party?"

"I think so," said Marsha, following her husband into the kitchen. She watched, bewildered, as he fumbled in the

wall cupboard for a couple of bottles. When he turned to face her, his eyes were dancing.

"Officer!" he bellowed.

They felt the *presence* instantly. "Yes?"

"Isn't it a police officer's duty to be helpful to people, when he's not preventing crime?" Harry asked.

"Certainly," said the voice.

"Well, my wife and I have decided to celebrate the coming of peace to the world at last, but we have a problem."

"State it," said the voice.

"It's a world-wide problem, I should warn you," Harry said. "Earthmen have debated it for years. You may need help from your fellow officers..."

"We are always linked," it responded. "Kindly state your dilemma, and it shall be resolved in short order."

"Oh, thank you," said Harry. "It's really very simple: What proportions of gin and vermouth make the ideal martini?"

"Excuse me, while I consult," said the voice.

The *presence* vanished. It was the last recorded instance of any personal contact between Orbic and Earthman.

There *was*, however, a ghastly hour of *impersonal* contact, as the members of the International Police Force, all culling their information from the various minds on the planet, met high over the Atlantic to have it out.

Historians say you could see the sparks for twenty miles as those painted spheres met in furious conflict, steel clashing against steel, until finally all of them met in one titanic clash that echoed from Liverpool to Long Island.

The mentally-heard cries of "4-to-1!" "9-to-2!" "7-to-3!" and so on, that gave the entire Earth population a headache, all ceased simultaneously, as the battered spheres, with their stunned occupants, plunged into the ocean. No one felt quite safe again for a week, the Orbic's air-breathing limit.

And then the peaceful feeling of world hostility came back, with its dangerous, but nostalgic, international emotion. Harry Coyne made a fortune with a new pre-mixed cocktail he's bottled and put on the market. He calls it the Doomsday Army Martini.

It's exactly one million, three hundred forty-two to one.

THE END

THE CLOSEST SCHOOL

By ZENNA HENDERSON

*Well, children, this story provides
the lesson for today. . . .*

WELL, we *were* the closest school.

The rolling grasslands stretched all dry and tawny from the front of the school up into the hills until the slopes got too steep for the grass to cling. Behind the school was my store and in front of it was the thin white-stitched black tape of the main highway and beyond that the rolling grasslands stretched all dry and tawny up into the hills until the slopes—

At right angles to both the school and store and facing another way was the church and in front of the church the rolling grasslands stretched all— The last direction was faced by the Community Center and the rolling grasslands—

Isolation, yeah, and plenty of it. It takes plenty of acres like ours to raise a few head of cattle, but Saturdays and Sundays we're pretty busy.

Dusty rivers pour themselves out of canyons and arroyos and out of the folds of the hills and solidify into dust-covered pickups and station wagons and cars in front of the store or Community Center. And, during the week, the station wagon school buses rattle out and in and out again and the fourteen kids spread themselves pretty good and fill the whole place with their clatter.

But sometimes in the evening, when the sun is spinning every blade of grass to gold or—along the back slope—kindling it to a fine spun-glass snowiness, I listen to the wind, thin and minor, keening through the gold and glass and wonder why anyone would want to live in such a dot under such wideness of sky with such a tawny tide of grass lapping up to such hills.

But things do happen out here—things to talk about, things to remember, things to

wonder about. Like the time when we *were* the closest school.

Naturally they came there to register their child. Mrs. Quinlan came fluttering over to the store early that morning before school. Mrs. Quinlan fluttering is a sight in itself. She's usually so self-contained and sort of unflappable.

"Bent," she said. "You're on the school board. What shall I do about this new student?"

"New student?" I squinted out the window of the store. "I didn't see anyone drive up."

"They didn't come by road," she said. "They cut across."

"From where?" I asked.

"From the Nuevas," she said.

"Cut *across* from the Nuevas!" The two of us silently contemplated the terrain between us and the Nuevas. "Maybe I'd better come see." I flipped the card on the front door that said, "*Come In. Back Soon.*" and followed her across the hollow square that separated the four buildings.

Well! As I caught sight of them, I nearly fluttered, myself. Then I got tickled and started my subterranean laughter that plagues me at times because it is almost inextinguishable.

"Bent!" Mrs. Quinlan flashed at me out of the corner of her eyes.

"I'm not laughing at them," I choked in a whisper. "It's Stringler. Wait'll he meets them!" I ironed out my face (her's began to crinkle) as best I could and gravely acknowledged her introduction.

"Mr. and Mrs. Powdang and Vannie."

I wondered, but I held out my hand anyway and felt warmth and friendliness in their firm clasps though they did tickle my palm.

"Pleased to meet you," I said. "This is an unexpected pleasure."

"Thank you."

"I don't know why I should have been startled. We get a fair number of transients through here and most of them are bi-lingual to the point of no accent. Why shouldn't the Powdangs be so also?"

"What's the problem?" I asked. "Haven't you any registration blanks?"

"Of course," said Mrs. Quinlan. "It's a matter of what to put in the blanks. Equivalents, sort of." But we both knew it wasn't that. She'd needed someone with her—someone—well, just someone.

"Well," I picked up the reg-

istration card. "Name, Vannie Powdang. Parent's name. Mr.—" I lifted my eyebrows at Mr. Powdang. "Your first name?" Mr. and Mrs. Powdang exchanged glances, and I almost dropped my pen. No valid reason why I should have been startled. Two eyes aren't necessarily standard equipment just because I count that many on myself.

"First name?"

"Like Vannie," said Mrs. Quinlan, crinkling secretly at me, now.

"Ooosh!" Mr. Powdang's eyes lit with a turquoise comprehension and he reeled off a string of syllables that stopped my pen in mid-air. "One or two will do," I said, "Spell them please."

Mrs. Quinlan said quickly, "They told me Vanseler Ovenry. It shrinks somewhat in translation."

I was afraid to meet her eyes since my mirthbox had been upset already and so I just quaked quietly as she spelled it out to me. I had just tailed the y when we were all startled by the ungodly screech of brakes that announced the fact that Stringler was trying to bring his pickup truck to a roaring stop from a blistering thirty-five miles an hour.

"Oh, oh!" I said, sliding

away from the desk. "We might as well get it over with now. I'll go drop a few preparatory hints."

I ducked into the store through the back door. Stringler was tromping up and down the room, gouging his heels into the planks at every step, dust dancing out of the cracks of the floor and flouring off his faded levi's.

"If yer gonna keep a store, Bent, keep one. Don't go galivanting off to see the school marm all the time!"

I think Stringler's mother was marked by reading a western before his birth. He always sounds like that anyway.

"What can I do you for today?" I asked.

"Outa color film," he said. "Frost's hit our upper ranch. Color like crazy, up Sycamore Canyon. Missed it last year on account of that gol-dang rain we had. Gonna get it this year or bust!"

"This is a fresh shipment," I said, fishing his account pad out of the drawer next to the cash register. "How many?"

"Half a dozen, I reckon." He pushed his battered hat back on his head. "Oughta last me a spell."

"We have a problem, this morning," I grunted as I made

out the sales slip. "School business. There's a new kid—"

"Why bother me?" Stringler stacked the film. "That's Mrs. Quinlan's business."

"Might be school board business 'fore it's through," I said. "Public opinion—" I settled myself for his roar.

"Public opinion! We got rules and regulations to run our school by! Anything come inside them rules and regulations thur ain't no question about. Stick to the rules and regulations!"

"But this is different. Foreign—"

"Since when you a foreigner hater!" It's incredible the volume that could come from such a scrawny old frame. "I thought *you* had a little sense!" He roared twice as loud because he knew and I knew that he resented "foreigners" fiercely—so fiercely that he was always compelled to defend them.

I ventured one dangerous phrase closer. I *had* to soften him for the kill—

"But their color—" And dodged. Three minutes later I shook my ringing head and tried to gouge a little of the noise out of my left ear with my little finger. I had heard it all before, but never so passionately. He must have had

another letter from his brother who lived back there where color matters so much that it's a sickness.

"Well, come and see them," I said. "Then nobody can accuse me of abrogating the duties of the president of the board."

He yanked the makin's from his pocket and flipped himself a cigaret and yanked the tobacco sack shut with his teeth as he glared at me and thumped down from his monumental wrath to the lesser grievance of my big words.

"Abrogatint!" He muttered as he let the back door slam behind him.

It was a dirty trick, I know, but I let him walk in cold. He was in a state of horrified petrification during Mrs. Quinlan's introduction and had automatically put out an answering hand, when he suddenly realized that his cigaret was still in it. He waved it wordlessly and fled outdoors. I followed, sincerely worried for fear he might have a stroke.

"Gaw-dang-amighty, Bent!" he gasped, leaning against the porch post. "We can't let nothing like that into our school. Purple!" he gasped, "Purple!"

"We have to," I said, feeling the mirth-quake starting again, "Rules and regulations.

Color doesn't count. Residents, school age—"

"Are you sure! Are you sure!" He clutched me with shaking hands. He was shook to the core of his being by this so extreme testing of his stand on color. "Lessee their registration card."

"We haven't finished it yet," I said. "We had just started it when you got here."

"There'll be something," he prayed. "There's gotta be something. You know me, Bent. Not a prejudiced bone in my body. Why, I bend over backwards—"

Yes. I knew, bent over backwards, impelled by the heavy hand of conscience that forced him to accept what he had been taught to mistrust and abhor. The very strength of the hand was because the other side of it was still so heavy with that same mistrust and abhorrence.

"But this is different," he pleaded. "This isn't the same at all! You've got to admit it—"

"A child is a child," I said. "All of one blood. No respecter of persons. Neither East nor West—bond nor free—" I meanly set all his familiar rallying quotes out in a little line across his conscience and his conscience stiffened itself—I thought it would—and his

sleeve wiped his forehead. Thank God for people who are willing to be uncomfortable for what is right.

"Rules and regulations," he said, starting back indoors. "If they meet with the rules and regulations then that's all there is—"

He sat, his forearms on his knees, his battered Stetson clinging above his eyebrows. He tried to keep from looking, but his eyes kept straying until he jerked them back to his clasped hands. You could almost see his ears prick up at each question on the registration card.

Name—Vannie Powdang
Parent's name — Vanseler
Oovenry Powdang
Sex—

Mrs. Quinlan colored briefly across her forehead. "Put it down F," she said.

"Put it down? Ain't it so?" snapped Stringler.

"Vannie hasn't decided yet," she said a bit primly. "She has until she's of age to decide."

"But—" Stringler's jaw dropped.

"F," I said. "There's nothing that says they have to be either one."

"Birthdate?"

There was a hurried consultation between the parents

and a quick glance through a pocket chart of some kind.

"Month?" I asked.

"Doshug — October," said Mrs. Powdang.

"What date in October and what year?"

"The twelfth," she answered. "1360."

"1360!" Stringler's mouth was getting ready for an explosion.

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Powdang fondly. "Just think! Vannie's 599 years old. They grow up so fast!" Vannie hid her eyes shyly against her mother.

"It says right there!" cried Stringler, his finger stabbing at the Rules and Regulations. "It says six years old by December 31!"

"To start school," I said. "And there's nothing about any maximum—" I wrote it down, *October 12, 1360*.

"And anyway, the equivalent comes out only five years old," said Mrs. Quinlan. "It's a sort of 100 to one ratio."

"There!" cried Stringler. "Not six yet!"

"Birthday in October," I said serenely, "Nationality?"

The parents looked at one another then swung their marble-round eyes—all eight of them—back to me.

"American," they said in chorus, "Vannie's American."

"American!" Stringler got up and started tramping the floor. He couldn't bear sitting any longer. The crampedness of the area hampered him so that he seemed more to whirl distractedly instead of pacing as he dug deep down into his despised big words. "That's pure and unadulterated misrepresentation!"

"No," said Mrs. Powdang, her eyes ranging themselves earnestly at Stringler. "She was born in the Nuevas in 1360. That makes her an American."

"But there wasn't even an *America* then!" snapped Stringler. "She can't be!"

"No regulation says she has to be," I countered. "Race?"

"We're Klaferoones," said Mrs. Powdang very proudly. "Members of Expedition Tronseese." I quirked an eyebrow at Stringler. He just breathed heavily and, sitting down, clasped his hands again.

"Yes," Mrs. Powdang went on eagerly, no different from any parents anywhere. "Our craft was disabled at a most inopportune time. It was just a week before Vannie hatched, but we—"

"Hatched!" groaned Stringler.

"—managed all right because only the motive was

damaged. The incubator was on a different circuit. Of course, we won't be here long, but we thought Vannie should utilize the opportunity to absorb as much of the foreign culture—"

"Foreign!" groaned Stringler.

"—as she could, even if only for a little while."

I made idle marks on the blotter with my pen. A little while? How long is that to a child who is 599 years old?

"No previous schooling?" I inquired.

"No, only what we have given her at home," said Mrs. Powdang. "She can travver to kestic and creve almost all the tonreach and—" her voice trailed off questioningly.

"No," said Mrs. Quinlan. "That's not included in our curriculum. Can she count Earth style?"

"Of course!" Mrs. Powdang was indignant. "Why before she was two hundred—"

"Umm, yes," murmured Mrs. Quinlan. "And our Alphabet?"

"Yes." Mrs. Powdang bit back more indignation. "Vannie—"

"Vannie began to sing, "A B C D E F G—" in a high clear voice as she slowly rotated in time to the music, fluffing up more and more until

the fine pale lavender thistle-like down that was her outer covering swept papers from the desk.

"That's fine," said Mrs. Quinlan. "We'll find her level without too much trouble. I wonder a little though about our desks. Her size presents somewhat of a problem."

"Vannie," said Mrs. Powdang.

Vannie collapsed in on herself like a flower folding, the thistle effect slicking down until she wavered in the slight breeze that came through the window, a slender, delicate slip of a child whose brilliant eyes were shy and anxious and very very blue.

Mrs. Quinlan hugged the fragile form to her side. "She'll fit," she smiled. "She'll fit all around."

"Vannie's so eager for school," said Mrs. Powdang. "After all, animals can only be adequate companionship for so long a time, their vocabulary is so limited. We're sure you won't have any trouble with Vannie. She has looked forward so long to school. We're sorry she's missed these first weeks, but we were on a field trip. I'm sure she can catch up and if there is anything we can help with—"

"I'm sure there won't be

any trouble," said Mrs. Quinlan. "Mr. Stringler—?"

"Do it again," he said, poking a fascinated finger at Vannie's slicked-down fluff, not even hearing Mrs. Quinlan. "Go on, do it again. Be a thistle."

Vannie glanced at her mother and slowly fluffed out wider and wider until she seemed to fill the small office, then she began the slow rotating dance again to her own high trilling that had no words this time. About the fifth time around, she scooped Stringler up and rotated with him. Dumb with astonishment, he semi-sat among her lovely amethyst fluffiness, his craggy face and clumby boots a comical contrast to her delicacy. Then—

"Lemme down!" he yelled, suddenly struggling. "Lemme down!"

Vannie did. Panic-stricken, she collapsed in one brief swoosh and hid behind her mother as Stringler thudded bone-jarringly to the floor.

"You frightened her!" cried Mrs. Quinlan.

"I frightened *her*!" yelled Stringler.

"Stringler," I said, "The child—"

"Child!" he muttered, dusting at his levi's. "Assault and battery!"

Mrs. Powdang had been murmuring to Vannie. Vannie peered out from behind her, apprehensively, then eased slowly out. She drifted over to Stringler and shyly touched his arm.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I forgot. I liked you and—and—I forgot."

"Forgot—" snorted Stringler, a rusty attempt at a blush scraping its way across his thin cheeks. "Okay, no harm." He dragged his hat off and slapped it against his leg. "But if one kid in this school gets scared by this—this—" Mrs. Powdang straightened slowly. The ceiling began to look awfully low. "—this child," Stringler went on, "Out it goes." And he stomped out of the office.

Mr. and Mrs. Powdang had hardly left, drifting like sedate tumble weeds across the malapai towards the Nuevas before Mrs. Quinlan hurried to the door.

"Here comes the first bus!" She dithered on the threshold, wetting her lips nervously. The station wagon swirled up a cloud of dust and errupted in several directions, spilling kids out like shelling peas.

Vannie stepped out of the door and stood there waiting

—all fluffly, all blue-eyed, all eager and shy. The thundering herd plowed to a stop a few feet from the porch.

"Hey! Lookit! What's that?" Begun Andresen's voice could have been heard back of the Nuevos. The kids all drifted together, bunched against the unknown. There was a wary, waiting moment, and Vannie drooped a little. Then Ingrid Andresen backed out of the station wagon, rasling with her own lunch pail and those of her three brothers that always seemed to be left to her. She turned around and the pails clattered to the ground.

"Ooo!" she said. "Who is it?"

"Ingrid," said Mrs. Quinlan. "This is our new girl, take care of her this first day?"

"A girl!" bugled Begun. "Looks more like a—"

"Charles!" Mrs. Quinlan didn't have to lift her voice. It cut him off in mid-speech.

"Hello," said Vannie, fluffing up a little.

"You're pretty," said Ingrid, moving closer. "Is that your dress?"

"No," said Vannie, "It's me."

"It's like your hair, Ingrid," said Mrs. Quinlan. "Isn't it lovely?"

"Can I touch it?" asked Ingrid.

"Sure," said Vannie, and Ingrid gingerly patted the softness.

She retreated a step. "Why have you got so many eyes?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Vannie, "Why have you only got two?"

"God made me this way," said Ingrid.

"He made me this way, too," said Vannie.

"God's bigger than the sky," confided Ingrid.

"I know it," said Vannie, "Cause we came from clear across to the other side of it and He's there, too, Momie says."

"And He's littler than a tear-of-sorrow, too," said Ingrid.

"What's a tear-of-sorrow?" asked Vannie.

"Don't you know how to cry?" asked Ingrid.

"I know how to dance," said Vannie. And she fluffed up wider and wider, swinging around and around, trilling her happy song.

"Gee!" said Ingrid, wide-eyed.

"I can carry you," said Vannie. "Then you'll be dancing, too. Jump on!"

Ingrid giggled and clutched

at Vannie. Vannie caught her up and swirled off across the yard, cradling the ecstatically shrieking Ingrid in her fluff.

"Hey!" Begun bellowed. "That looks like fun!" And the boys pelted off across the playground after the two girls.

The bus driver, who had been watching from the station wagon, spat reflectively out the window and roared into reverse. "Telephone booths and hula hoops and then this. What next!"

Mrs. Quinlan dropped down on the step and smiled up at me weakly. My answering smile broke to laughter as Stringler straightened up from leaning against the

porch post muttering, "Color film to burn and my camera back at the ranch."

So that was Vannie. She *did* stay only a short time. Before Christmas there was a low green fireball slanting down over the Nuevas and after Christmas—Vannie was the Angel Hosts—two green fireballs slanting up over the Nuevas—one of them carrying a school transfer slip made out to Vannie Powdang.

And all recess the next day, Ingrid rotated sadly, holding out the fluff of her skirts, singing a thin high song without words—a song that bubbled to sobs when she got so dizzy she had to stop a while.

THE END

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THE SUMMER VISITORS

*High on the cliff they
sat, feared and isolated. . . . Then a little
boy climbed up to
meet them . . . and
found a world opened
to him.*

By GORDON R. DICKSON

ILLUSTRATED by SUMMERS

GASPING, and with the pounding of his heart shaking him like an inner hand, Toby Allen clung for a moment to a runty spruce growing directly out from the granite of the cliff face, and looked down. They had not followed. He could see their three upstaring faces some

sixty feet below him, etched against the white dust of the dirt road at their feet; and shame pressed through him again like the heat from an electric blanket did when he would be sick in bed with the chills. The oldest Morley brother was no bigger than Toby, though he was a year

older, at eleven, and Jackie Larsman was even smaller, at ten, Toby's own age. But they were all very tough, and there were three of them.

Toby whimpered a little to himself, as he clung to the spruce. Stand and fight, they always said—his mother and Larry Werner—but they were grown up; and Mother had been a girl and didn't know, and Larry was so wound up in making computers and hanging around Mother, Toby did not believe he even remembered what it was like to be young. Now Toby clung, getting his breath back and looking out over the roofs of the summer resort town and Lake Minnetka. At any rate the two Morleys and Jackie had not come up the cliff after him—and then it occurred to him with a feeble spurt of pride that maybe they were afraid to. It was not easy to climb a cliff like this, even when you were trapped; but Toby's father had climbed mountains when he was alive, and that was one thing Toby could do. He could not fight much, but he could climb.

He looked up now to the top edge of the cliff. He could see nothing beyond it, but he knew the big house was there; the big house with the high wire fence that went all the

way down the tangled other side of the hill to the road and back around to the bottom of the cliff. Not even the delivery men were allowed through its gate; and it occurred to Toby, suddenly, that maybe that was another reason the Morleys and Jackie had not followed him. There were all sorts of stories about the big house on the hill.

But the edge was less than thirty feet above him, and he could not go back down. He would tell the people in the house what had happened, and maybe they would send him home in a car, like those people the time he was lost from summer camp and stumbled on their cabin, up in Michigan.

He continued, slowly and carefully up the cliff. It was really not too hard to climb, if you kept your head and tested everything before putting your weight on it. That was what Dad had always said, keep your head and make sure—and take your time. And after a bit he came to the edge of the cliff.

There was a little crack and slope right at the edge. He went up this quite easily and crawled out onto a mat of quack grass, thick from the long months of summer sun.

The quack grass was always everywhere in late August, and in everybody's lawn.

He lay still for a moment, resting. Then he sat up and looked about him. He was right behind some brown-shingled building with a tile roof, over which the greater height of the big house loomed in hot and heavy contours of white stone. There was a clink of metal from inside the smaller building.

He got up, and very quietly went around the side of the building. He stepped onto lawn, not very well kept, and looked through a small door, ajar; into a dim interior. What he saw appeared to be a garage with several old cars in it. One of them had its hood off, and a big man was bending over it, doing something with the motor.

Hesitantly, Toby approached the man. His tennis shoes made no sound at all on the dark cement of the garage floor and he was almost on the man when the big bulk straightened up, and turned and stared at him.

"Boy!" said the man. "Where did you come from?"

Toby shrunk up before the heavy voice. The big man was truly a giant, with great-muscled arms as thick-looking as redwood posts. Toby recog-

nized him now. He was the handyman up at the big house, who met all the delivery trucks at the gate in the fence and carried the deliveries up himself. There were stories about him, too, and one of the kid versions had it that he would go crazy and break you in two pieces if he got mad.

"I climbed," said Toby, "up the cliff. Please, I had to."

"Climbed?" boomed the big man. His eyebrows went up under the gray curls on his forehead, and he bent down so that his great, heavy jaw hung just a little above Toby's eyes. "What do you mean? Up *our* cliff?"

He sounded as if he was going to be mad, and Toby, not able to take any more, burst into tears. Between sobs, he told the whole story. How Larry Werner had taken his mother out for a drive, because it was Sunday; and there hadn't been anything for Toby to do, so he had just gone for a walk, and the Morleys and Jackie Larsman had chased him—and everything.

"Here, boy," said the big man, after he was done, handing him a wad of clean cotton waste large enough to make a double handful for Toby. "Blow your nose. Don't you

know nobody's allowed here? But you climbed that cliff?"

Toby nodded, and blew his nose, and wiped his eyes; and told him about how his Dad had climbed mountains.

"By—" began the big man, and then burst into laughter. The whole garage echoed with it. "At this late date! But a hero, a cowardly hero!" And he clapped his huge hands together and laughed again.

"But, come on, boy," he said, when he was done laughing. He took off a sort of mechanic's apron, standing revealed in canvas trousers and a dirty t-shirt. "Father'll have to hear of this."

He led Toby out through the big open doors of the garage at the far end. They emerged onto a terrace, and went down several wide stone steps into a square, sunken garden, very much overgrown with weeds except for a flagstone walk enclosing a shallow, square fish pond in which some large goldfish swam lazily about in murky water among water weeds. Spaced around the flagstone were blocks of white stone like the blocks that made up the big house, looking rather worn as if they had been sat on a lot; and at the far end of the garden was an actual seat of stone, with stone arms, in which sat the

fattest and largest old man Toby had ever seen. Striding up and down and muttering to himself by the old man was another man, not quite so fat or old, dressed in some sort of red uniform with rows of medals on it. With two heavy fingers on one of Toby's shoulders, the handyman steered him up in front of the old man in the stone seat.

It was very hot in the garden with the sun beating full upon it and no breeze getting down into it. The old, fat man seemed to be drowsing with his eyes closed. He did not move, even when they came right up in front of him. Toby stood stiffly by the big man.

"Father!" boomed the handyman, and the old man opened his eyes slowly and lazily. First they focused on the handyman, and then they looked down, as if it was a very long way to look, and focused on Toby.

"What's this?" he said. And the handyman told him, the whole story, laughing again as he covered the part about how Toby had come to climb the cliff.

"Mnph!" said Father, and apparently went back to sleep. But the man in the uniform had come close during the telling of the story, and seemed

to be more than a little excited over it.

"What? What's this?" he barked. "A boy who doesn't like to fight?"

"A boy who climbs cliffs, General," said the handyman, chuckling.

"Cliffs!" snorted the General. "What are cliffs? Combat, now, ah!" and his eyes lit up. "Slash! Bang!" He was carrying some sort of heavy walking stick, and as he said the last two words, he hit out with it at one of the two stone blocks that flanked Father's stone armchair. "That's the stuff!"

"There were three of them," protested Toby.

"What of it, boy?"

"They would have beat me up."

"Hah!" snorted the General. "Beat you, would they? Let them try. Let them try!" And *whack, thwack*, went the walking stick again against the stone block. "Take that! Hah! Hey!—here, boy, you try!"

He handed the stick to Toby. Toby took it rather shyly.

"Well, don't just stand there. Hit it! Hit it! Get in the mood!" barked the General. "What are odds? Surrounded, outnumbered, what of it? Harder, boy, harder!" cried

the General; and Toby, who had been whacking the stone block rather diffidently, began to redouble his blows. "That's more like it. Harder! That's more like it. Snort, boy, yell a bit! Get in the mood. That's right—"

Toby was indeed getting in the mood. Under the contagious fever of the General's voice, he saw himself, sword in hand at bay against innumerable foes. He gave himself over to imagining and a red fog of battle danced before his eyes.

"That's it," said the General, when at last Toby had to stop for breath. "Give me the stick back. That's more like it. Not good, yet, but you're on the way. It's not the odds, it's the attitude that counts. Remember that. Nothing like a good battle—" and without a further word to anyone else, he went off, slashing at the weeds and stone blocks, and muttering to himself.

Toby stood where he was, still glowing with the ardor of combat. He came out of it with a start to feel the handyman's heavy fingers on his shoulder.

"Come on, boy," said the handyman, turning, "have to send you home, now."

The handyman took him

back to the garage and they both climbed into an old panel truck.

"I'll drive you down to the gate," said the handyman. "You can go the rest of the way, yourself."

Toby felt a sudden chill of disappointment reaching through the warmth engendered by the exercise that still seemed to cling to him, more stubbornly than such things usually did.

"Can I come back?" he said, abruptly, without thinking.

The handyman started the motor of the panel truck and backed it out into the sunlight. He turned it's nose down the driveway leading toward the far end and hidden gate.

"Why?" he said, turning and lowering his heavy face until it was close to Toby's.

The bubble of unhappiness that Toby always carried with him these days seemed to swell upward suddenly within him until it burst at his lips.

"I don't have anything to do," he said. "Mother's always having to see lawyers about business and things. It's three years now since Dad died, and she's still always running around settling things. And when she's got a little time, that Larry Werner comes over."

"Who's Larry Werner?" said the handyman, steering the panel truck slowly and carefully down the winding drive past the wild tangle of bush and trees on the unlandscaped part of the estate.

"He's an electronics engineer," Toby scowled and almost kicked the dashboard of the panel truck, but stopped himself in time. "He wants to marry my mother."

"Why not?" said the handyman, chuckling. Toby turned his head to stare at the big man.

"Why, she's *my* mother!" said Toby. The handyman chuckled again. Toby felt hot and strange, as if he should be mad at the handyman for laughing at him, but somehow couldn't quite make it.

"Oh, he's all right, Larry," said Toby. "Why doesn't he go marry somebody else's mother, that's all I want to know?"

"Doesn't want to, maybe," said the handyman, turning his big face to grin down at Toby.

"Well, she's *my* mother," said Toby, again, but not as strongly as he had said it before. He had the most peculiar feeling that he was in the wrong somehow, though he had never felt that way about it before. The panel truck,

crawling slowly down the drive, had come at last to the level. It rounded a final turn and there was the gate before them. The handyman turned the panel around in a little open space so that it headed back the way it had come, up the drive again, and stopped. Toby opened the door reluctantly, and got out.

"Just lift up the latch and push," said the big man. "Close it after you're out. It'll lock behind you."

"You didn't say if I could come again," protested Toby. The handyman leaned over and down toward him.

"Can you climb that cliff again?" he whispered, with a grin.

"Sure," said Toby, firmly.

"Next Sunday, then. Afternoon." The handyman gave Toby a ponderous wink, then straightened up again, and set the panel in motion. Toby watched him go, then turned to the gate and let himself out.

He headed for home. But as he went down the road toward town, the memory of the General came back to his mind, and he started to glow again, remembering his mock battle with the stone block. Toby's pace quickened, and when he got back down into the streets of the town he turned off from the direct route back to the

lakeside cottage he shared with his mother, and went in another direction.

The afternoon sun was lowering over the lake into dinner-time position as Toby finally approached his home, looking somewhat disheveled. Larry's car was in the drive and Larry and his mother were just getting out of it. Toby's mother had that look on her face that she sometimes got after going out with Larry, but it disappeared as she recognized her son.

"Toby!" she cried. "What happened?"

"Nothing," said Toby, nonchalantly. "I had a fight with Kenny Morley, that's all."

"Darling! Are you hurt?" She started to go to him, but Larry Werner caught her hand. He was a tall, lean man with curly black hair and a bony, humorously-ugly face. He grinned down at Toby with a grin something like the handyman's.

"Pretty good," he said. "Who won?"

"He did," said Toby, carelessly. "But it's all right, we're friends now." He turned and began to run into the house. "I'll go get cleaned up for dinner," he called back over his shoulder.

Toby's mother made an-

other move to go after him, but Larry again held her back. Toby heard his voice fading out behind Toby's back.

"Let him be," Larry said. "He's fine. He hasn't looked that bright-eyed in months, and you know it."

When he climbed the cliff the following Sunday, Toby found the handyman waiting for him in the garage, and polishing one of the old cars. He gave Toby a grin and another of his heavy winks, but continued to polish without saying anything until the paste wax he had spread out on the body of the sedan before him was all brought to a high, slick shine. Then he wiped his hands and turned to Toby.

"Come on, then," he said.

They went out the front of the garage into the sun and down into the sunken garden, which was as still and hot as before. The General was there, pacing up and down, and the great, fat old man in the stone armchair, looking as if he had not moved since Toby's last visit. But there was also a middle-aged but still very beautiful lady pacing back and forth as well.

"Here, Father!" boomed the handyman, bringing Toby up before the fat old man.

"Here's the boy come again."

Father lifted his eyelids a little lazily to glance at Toby, and then closed them again, indifferently. Toby heard steps behind him and light fingers in his hair. He turned his head and looked up into the face of the beautiful lady.

"You're a pretty boy," said the lady, slowly. "You'll grow up into something to look at, one of these days."

Her voice was a little too caressing, and Toby was embarrassed by the fingers in his hair, but a certain shyness kept him from pulling away. The lady saw, however, and sighed, and went pacing away across the garden, up the stone steps and in toward the house.

"Well, boy, back again!" snapped the General. "Did you fight, eh?"

"Oh, yes," said Toby, eagerly. "I had a fight with Kenny Morley right after I left here."

"Hah!" said the General fiercely and happily. "That's the way. Charge into it. Don't delay. He who hesitates is half-defeated. Carry the fight to them."

"I did," said Toby.

"Good. That's the world, boy. A hard rock for the spineless, but an oyster to be opened by the brave. By your

deeds will they judge you. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," said Toby.

"Follow courage first, foremost and always. Nothing else compares."

"Nonsense, General!" said a sharp, feminine voice, and they both looked up to see another lady coming down the steps from the house into the garden. She was thinner than the other lady, and while not exactly less beautiful or younger, she had certain air of competence and sharpness about her. She made Toby think of a schoolteacher. "Don't fill the boy's head with notions." She bent her sharp gray eyes on Toby, and at once he felt very small in a way that none of the others had made him feel. "Brute courage is all right for the brutes. Don't class yourself with the brutes, boy."

"N-no—" quavered Toby, wishing he could look away from her piercing eyes.

"Old maid vapors!" grumbled the General, and went stamping off into the house.

"Pay no attention to him," said the lady. "Courage is all very well, but not to be compared to what goes on in your head. Did you ever hear of Archimedes?"

"No," said Toby. He was

staring at her, fascinated now. The name she had just said had come ringing out on the still air of the garden like the pure note of a trumpet, though it did not seem that she had raised her voice.

"Archimedes, boy, said— 'Give me a place to stand and I will move the earth.' Do you know what he meant by that?"

"No," said Toby.

"He meant," said the lady, "that nothing is so big that knowledge cannot be brought to bear upon it. Man may be small, but the intangible power of his mind, exerted upon the long lever of knowledge, can shift the mighty world or shake the mightier universe. You, boy, could shift the world, little as you are, could turn this Earth from its orbit around the sun if you had the knowledge and the will."

"Me?" said Toby.

"You or any thinking being." The lady looked at him severely. "But the lever of knowledge isn't picked up in an instant, like a sword dropped by somebody else on a battlefield. Everyone has to forge it for himself, length by slow length, so that when he finally comes to use it he has the muscles for its use."

"Could I really move the world?" asked Toby, dazzled.

"Look around you," said the lady. "The world is being moved in bits and pieces every day by men who were once boys like you. Don't you know anyone who uses knowledge, boy?"

"I guess Larry does," said Toby.

"Larry?" queried the lady, sharply.

"Larry's a friend of my mother's. He's an electronic engineer."

"And how did he get to be an electronics engineer?" said the lady. "Not just by sitting down at a desk and calling himself one, you can be sure."

Toby wriggled embarrassedly.

"Larry can't move the world," he said.

"How do you know?" snapped the lady. "*His* lever of knowledge is far too heavy for *you* to lift. You couldn't even budge it."

"Could if I went to college," muttered Toby.

"College? Hah!" said the lady. "It takes more than college, boy. It takes the will to wisdom; the vision to dream, the hunger to learn, and the determination to put what's learned to use. These are what move the lever. Go to college, indeed! As if that were all!"

"Well, anyway," said Toby. "Larry's not that cool. I know him."

"Do you? Hmph!" sniffed the lady. "I don't think you do. Why don't you ask him, sometime?" And, turning sharply she went back into the house.

Toby, gazing after her, had a sudden wild desire to run and follow, to beg her pardon and ask her more about moving the world. But before he could take a step, he felt the handyman's heavy fingers on his shoulder.

"Time to go, now," said the handyman.

"But I just got here!" cried Toby.

"All the same," said the handyman, and turning Toby about with his fingertips, steered him off.

They took the panel truck down to the gate again.

"Can I come next Sunday? Can I?" pleaded Toby, as the handyman turned the truck around to face back up hill again.

"Well—" the big face looked doubtful.

"Oh, please!" said Toby.

"Well, one more time, maybe," said the handyman. "The summer's almost over. We'll be leaving, soon." And he winked at Toby, and drove off.

That next week, on Tuesday, Toby got a chance to talk to Larry one evening when Larry was over for dinner and his mother was busy in the kitchen.

"Larry," he said. "Would you like to be able to move the world?"

Larry, who was looking at a magazine he had brought home from the plant, lowered it and looked over at Toby in surprise.

"Sure I would, Toby," he said. "That'd be quite an accomplishment."

"How come you don't try then?" said Toby.

"Well—" said Larry. He put the magazine down on an end table, entirely. And suddenly, for the first time, they found themselves talking . . .

—Later that night Larry talked about it again, but this time with Toby's mother.

"I don't know," he confessed. "I seem to have cracked through, or something. He was all ears."

"Maybe—" said Toby's mother.

"Yes, maybe—" said Larry. And they both looked at each other.

The next Sunday, Toby did not climb the cliff. He went boldly, instead, to the gate and pressed the button put

there for the delivery men to announce their presence to the big house. And then he waited. When nobody came, he reached through the bars of the gate—it was not too hard for anyone with a hand and arm as thin as his—and pressed the latch from the inside.

He pushed the gate open and closed it behind him, and started on foot up the drive. He was almost to the top before he saw the towering form of the handyman coming striding to meet him. Toby ran to meet him; but the big man looked down at him with his heavy face set in lines of sternness, and this time he did not wink.

"I rang, but you didn't come," said Toby.

"Why did you let yourself in, boy?" said the handyman, his deep voice echoing among the tangled plants and bushes on either side of the drive.

"You said I could come," said Toby. He looked up into the big face looming over him. "Nobody else has to climb that old cliff. I don't see why I have to." The handyman merely stood, looking down at him. "What's the matter? Isn't anybody up in the garden?"

The handyman swung around abruptly.

"Come on," he said. He went back up the drive with giant steps, Toby running to keep up with him.

They took a path around the side of the house, past the open mouth of the garage and went down the steps into the near end of the garden. At the far end, the old, fat man sat as usual in his stone chair, but there were a number of others in the garden, including the General, and the two ladies, but also others Toby had never seen before, men and ladies both. Toby saw the lady he had talked to last time standing talking to the General, and without waiting for anything more, he went up to her.

"Hi," he said.

Both the lady and the General turned to look down at him. Like the handyman, they did not seem particularly pleased to see him.

"Well, here I am again," said Toby.

"I see that," said the lady, sharply.

"I just thought I'd tell you," said Toby, "I talked to Larry. It's pretty good, that electronics. I guess I'll be an engineer, myself."

"Boy," muttered the General, "Don't forget."

"You mean all that stuff

you told me?" said Toby, glancing up at him. "No, I won't forget. But I got all that made, now, that courage stuff. And pretty soon I'll have it all made what she told me, after I've been to school and worked some."

"Just like that!" said the lady, ironically.

"Well, that's what you said, wasn't it?" said Toby. He saw all the others in the garden were looking at him now and it made him feel rather larger and more important than he had ever felt up here before. "I know you said it'll be tough. I don't mind. I'm not afraid of work. I'm not afraid of anything."

"Aren't you?" said the lady.

"Heck, no!" said Toby. "Anybody can be afraid. That's nothing. All you got to do is make up your mind and go ahead, and you can do anything." He looked around at them. "That's what I say," he added.

"Boy, boy," said the General, shaking his head.

"Oh, what do you know about it?" said Toby, turning on him. "I bet you haven't even had as much school as I have."

"Mind your manners!" snapped the lady.

"I don't have to!" cried

Toby, turning on her. "He's not my boss. And you aren't either. I thought you'd be glad to hear how good I'm doing, but you don't even care. He's just a funny old man and you're a funny old maid, and I don't have to pay any attention to either of you . . ."

And he turned away, to run out of the garden and away down the drive, but he never made it.

"*Boy!*" said a voice.

The one word rolled like muted thunder down the length of the garden; and Toby, caught by something that held him like some huge hand capturing a fly, turned about and looked.

He stared across the open space of the fish pond to the fat old man in the stone arm-chair. But the old man did not look fat and sleepy any longer. His eyes were wide open, looking at Toby, and he loomed, immense and terrifying.

"Come here," said the old man, in the same, awful voice.

Around Toby, all the rest of the people had fallen silent. They stood still as statues, and they seemed to have shrunk in the sound of that voice. Desperately, Toby longed for one of them, the General, the Lady, or even

the handyman, to speak up for him, or come forward with him. But none of them moved or made a sound and suddenly Toby realised that in comparison to the old man who sat waiting they were all nothing, and less than nothing; and none of them could help him now.

Slowly, creepingly, against his will, Toby moved down the length of the garden until he stood directly before and below the old man in the stone chair.

"Boy," said the old man, and his voice filled all the air about them, "you are like all the rest. Petty, overweening, ungrateful. Because you dared to climb a cliff, you were accepted here for a moment or two. You have been given courage and a path to wisdom, which are gifts of the gods; and now in your little pride and glory, you think you know it all."

He paused for a moment, and Toby stood still and helpless, as frozen as the stone before him.

"I will give you a third lesson to learn," said the old man, "And that is that you are small and weak, in your own right. And it does not become the small and weak to be selfish and overbearing, to think that they know it all,

and to expect those that love them, or those that are kind to them, to always cater to their wants and prejudices. Go, boy, and learn humility, and kindness, and what is right!"

And then Toby was free. He turned and went. At first he stumbled. But then he ran. And ran, and ran. And ran.

It was several days before they would let Toby out of bed again. Dr. Alisanti said he had had a touch of sunstroke, and should be kept quiet for a while. And for several days he did not want to go anywhere anyway. All he wanted to do was to stay close and safe in his own bed, in his own house, with his mother to tuck him in under the covers; and Larry to come in now and again, and sit big, and comforting and grownup by his bed while he said comforting things in a voice that was deep and male, but not terrifying as the old man's voice had been.

But on Wednesday they let him get up and about again; and the following Sunday he went once more to the big house on the cliff. The gate was padlocked, now with a heavy chain, but he had not expected it to be open. He went around to the cliff, and

—for the last time—he climbed it.

On top of the cliff, all was silent and still. It even smelled deserted. Timidly, he went through the garage and down into the garden. It was empty, as he had known it would be, but now there was something different about it.

The goldfish still swam in the pool, but about the walk surrounding it, the blocks of stone were no longer empty. On each one stood a man or woman, carved in stone. And, as he went down the line, Toby recognized each one of them. They were slimmer and younger than when he had seen them last, and for the most part they had no clothes on, but he recognised the General, and the sharp lady, and even the handyman, leaning on a great stone club on the last block of all.

At the far end of the garden a leaner version of the old man filled the stone seat above the rest. His stone eyes were open, but they looked out over Toby's head at something distant and invisible. For a second, as he stood there, a shiver trembled through Toby, and he reached out a hesitant hand to touch the stone knee, on a level with his nose.

But the touch of the stone

reassured him. It was only rock; and, suddenly, a feeling of joy and freedom burst up within him. He felt light and loose, like a prisoner given his liberty again; and he turned happily away.

Larry and his mother were getting out of the car after their Sunday drive, as he got home. He ran across the lawn to them, pellmell, and

flung his arms around both of them, hugging them.

"Oh boy!" he cried. "Oh, boy! You're back!"

"Well!" said Larry, patting Toby fondly on his back. And Larry and his mother looked across at each other over Toby's head, smiling at each other like people who have come safe to harbor, together and united, at last.

THE END

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EVE TIMES FOUR

By POUL ANDERSON

ILLUSTRATED by GRAYAM

*Most men would be satisfied to be
cast away on a deserted planet with
one beautiful girl for a companion.
But not John Jacob Newhouse.*

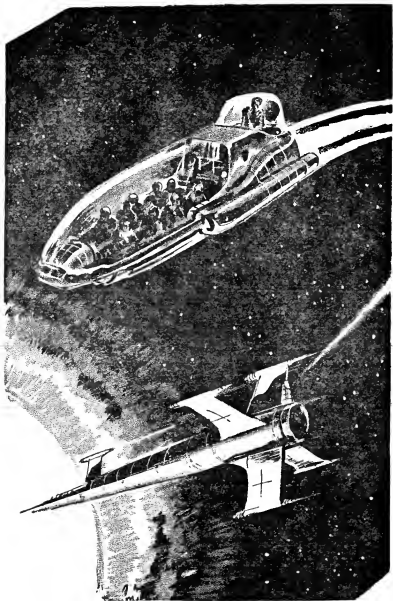
ARSANG talked on. And on. And on.

"It is indeed a pity," he said, "though, of course, long ago foreseeable, through the diversity of protein structures and the consequent development of mutually poisonous biochemistries—not to mention the basic variations in stellar and planetary types—it is, I say, regrettable that the percentage of worlds suitable for any given species is so small. And then, to be sure, this is reduced still further by those planets which already have autochthonous intelligent species. These would hardly welcome alien colonists."

Teresina Fabian gazed in despair out of that viewport which formed one whole wall of the lounge. Space glittered with suns and suns; but she

stood in an almost visible fog of shrill platitudes, and there was no escape. How had she ever been trapped into this? By being kind to Arsang, she decided, by not cutting him off the first time his fingers closed about her arm and his voice began to pipe. But how could she have known? This was her first deep-space voyage. The more experienced passengers, aware that every ship has its bore, recognized the dread tokens at once and gave Arsang a wide orbit.

"So the colonies planted by any given race, such as your own, are scattered thinly through that small portion of the galaxy we know," he continued, as importantly as he had earlier informed her that she was, of course, a graduate student of mathematics, bound



Shocked and surprised the occupants of the lifeboat found themselves castaways in space.

for a year of study on a newly autonomous human-settled planet as part of an exchange program. "The distance between Earth and Xenophon, 154 light-years approximately, is not an unusual hop for a liner such as this. But the round-trip cruise on which most of our fellow passengers are embarked must necessarily zigzag so much between the systems it visits, that side trips to the less important places lying more or less along our route, become impractical. One would not add an extra week of travel time merely to spend a single day looking at the Great Mud Mountain on New Ganymede, the double planet Holmes-Watson, the satellite system of Kepler, or the craters on Jotunheim, even though these are all terrestroid worlds with human colonies and do not lie very far off our path. You see, they are such new colonies: one tiny settlement on each, with little entertainment to offer, and otherwise a nearly unexplored wilderness. Having seen the one spectacular sight, what would our tourists do with their evening? Whereas Xenophon, where you get off, or my own Betelgeuse Eight, Numa, which the ship will reach on the homeward arc of its circuit and

where, of course, I disembark to report to my colleagues in the diplomatic service of His Awe-Inspiring Refulgence, Pipp XI, Supreme Overlord of the United States of Korlaband—"

The high-pitched lecture began to take on a chanting quality. Bemused, half asleep, Teresina had a dream-like feeling that she stood in the anteroom of eternity and heard a cantor or priest hold some unending ceremony. . . .

She grew conscious that another human had entered the lounge. For a moment her heart fluttered in the hope of deliverance. Even if it was John Jacob Newhouse—fighting off his attentions was better than being talked at by Arsang XXXIII, Lord High Gongbeater to the Prideful Court of His Awe-Inspiring Refulgence Pipp XI—anything was better, she was suffering a fate worse than death and hadn't even been offered an apartment, jewels, money.

The third mate checked his stride an instant. He was a good-looking young man, with dark wavy hair and regular features. His uniform, blue tunic, white pants, peaked cap, didn't hurt those looks a bit. Of all this he was thoroughly cognizant. A moment his eyes

lingered on her, frankly admiring.

Teresina was of the tall and willowy persuasion, with long blonde hair and large blue eyes, snub nose and slightly parted lips. Her black kirtle and white mantle had child-like connotations on Earth, protective coloration for a shy girl who didn't know quite what to do when a man spoke to her in any language but mathematics. The trouble was, as Newhouse had quickly observed, such an outfit looked remarkably sexy on a space liner.

But then Arsang had cornered her, and Arsang could outchaperone any Spanish duenna. Not that the Betelgeusean was unprepossessing. He had a certain elfin quality, big dome of a head and small torso poised on four spidery legs, two slender arms waving in time with his fronded ears, hairless pale-gold skin, the face quasi-human but with great green eyes, the clothing a filmy shimmer of veils. His size, below one meter, added to the charm. However, he talked.

"Ah, Miss Fabian." Newhouse swept a bow in her direction. "I hope you are enjoying yourself?"

Teresina gritted her teeth. "Yes, thank you!" she said.

Newhouse raised one brow, threw her an outrageous wink, and continued on his way. Teresina stared after him with smoldering eyes. Really, he was inexcusable! Not that she was cold or . . . or anything . . . of course she wanted to get married some day, and so on (here she blushed, and even diverted her attention back to Arsang for a moment) . . . but that scene on the promenade deck, near the start of the voyage, well, after all, a man might wait a little while after being introduced before mauling a girl around!

With a certain malicious pleasure, Teresina saw Hedwig Trumbull rise hastily from her cocktail, to seize the mate's arm. Undoubtedly: "Oh, dear Mr. Newhouse—or *may* I call you Jack?"—But the officer seemed to claim urgent business; at any rate, Hedwig Trumbull returned to her table and he went out the other side of the lounge.

"I think," said Teresina, grasping at straws, "I want a before-dinner drink myself."

"By all means," said Arsang. Her faint hopes evaporated as he walked alongside her, still discoursing. Now it was about his special diplomatic mission to the Earth

government, undertaken to draw up the protocol of a treaty regulating the quigg-sharfen trade. She thought wildly of telling him to go away, he bored her, he reached such heights of dreariness that it was like entering a different continuum. . . . But no. She wasn't capable of it. She would always remember, afterward, that she had hurt a lonely little being for the sake of a few days' pleasure.

She sat down and stared at the pneumoserv. It stared back at her. She remembered vaguely that a martini was gin and, what was it, oh, yes, vermouth, and wondered what proportions. At last she dialed for half and half.

Fortunately, the alarm went off at that exact moment.

Even Arsang stopped talking when the bell-tone racketed between the walls. As it died away, some woman at another table screamed and huddled close to her escort.

A magnified voice boomed out: "Attention, all passengers, attention, all passengers. This is First Mate Lefkowitz on the bridge, addressing all passengers. The captain will speak to you in a moment. Please remain calm," etc., etc.

There was a sound of clicking relays. The amplifiers

carried a whisper, "Wake up, sir, for God's sake," and an "Uh, oh, oof, huh?" in reply, before hurriedly switching back to more alarm bells.

"What is this outrage?" shrilled Arsang.

"I believe—" Teresina wet her lips. Her pulse seemed very noisy, all at once. "I think it's the signal to go to the lifeboats."

"Yes, lifeboats, yes, that's it, lifeboats," roared a sleep-fogged voice from the loud-speaker. "Lifeboats. You all remember your lifeboat drill, uh . . . ahhh-hoo! This is Captain Ironsmiter speaking, ladies and gentlebeings. No need to get alarmed. That is, well, naturally you have been alarmed, by the alarm bells, I mean. That's what they're for, isn't it? But what I want to say, that is to say, don't be afraid. Have faith. Nothing to be afraid of. Some or other little trouble, the automatic alarms went off. We haven't located the trouble yet, but we will. Meanwhile, have faith. Uh, did I tell you this is Captain Ironsmiter speaking? To the passengers, that is, such as hear me, and I do hope that each and every one of you can hear me. All crewmen will report to, what, oh, yes, emergency stations. This is just an automatic

alarm. Maybe the converter's developed a slight flutter, maybe the radiation screen has weakened, temporarily, that is, but anyhow, just go to your lifeboat stations, the ones to which you have each and every one been assigned to, and as soon as we've found the trouble and fixed it—that is, to say, it's only a precaution, and—" The captain was cut out of the circuit in favor of more alarm bells.

"I'm in Fourteen," said Teresina. She leaped to her feet. "I'll be seeing you, Mr. Arsang."

"Oh, I'll come along with you," grumbled the Betelgeusean.

"What?" wailed Teresina. "But you aren't . . . it isn't . . . I remember the drill distinctly, and your station isn't—"

"I know, I know, I know," snapped Arsang. "But how should I know which one it is? Do they expect me, hereditary Lord High Gongbeater to the Prideful Court of H.A.R. Pipp XI, and special diplomatic representative from the United States of Korlaband, to attend some wretched little lifeboat drill? Come along, now, come along." He took her arm and hustled her forward with a strength remarkable in the native of a rather low-gravity planet. "Incompe-

tence!" he shrilled. "Utter, unpardonable incompetence! I shall criticize the company in the strongest terms! See if I don't!"

The passageways were a millstream of babbling tourists and valiantly struggling stewards, through which an occasional spaceman struggled toward his post of duty. Swirled around a corner, Teresina saw Fred of the Gombar Road and remembered that he was in her section. "Can you give me some help?" she cried. "I can't make any headway in this mess."

"Why, indeed, Miss Fabian, I shall be honored," said the mild basso, a meter above her. One huge arm bent downward in an inviting crook. Teresina sprang up and settled herself. Fred's shaggy, blue, rhinoceros-like body plowed onward, his centauroid torso breasting a virtual bow wave of humans. Arsang followed close behind, sputtering.

Teresina leaned toward one fan-shaped ear and said above the hubbub: "Do you think this is anything serious, Mr. Fred?"

"I trust not," replied the other. "Dear me, I do trust not. I was so looking forward to visiting Xenophon and seeing a virile pioneer culture

at first hand." His small trunk waggled as he lowered his head to get its purple comb under a light fixture. The beady eyes glittered with anxiety. "I must confess to severe disappointment during my stay on Earth. There was no poetic inspiration for me. None whatsoever. Oh, don't think I blame your species, please, Miss Fabian. Everyone was most kind and hospitable. But you see, I had come as an enthusiastic student of Baudelaire. I felt I must live where he lived, just as he lived fully to understand him. But nobody on Earth seemed to be interested nowadays in decadence." His meter-wide shoulders gave an earthquake shrug. "And it is not practical to be decadent all by oneself."

Teresina wondered if she had traded the frying pan for the heating coils.

Then they were at the lifeboat, through its airlock and into the seating section. The miniature spaceship would normally have carried ten humans, but since Fred was assigned to it there were only four Terrestrials present. Teresina strapped herself into a chair next to a stewardess, one Marie Quesnay. She was probably the most sensible person aboard. Besides,

though it was a nasty trick, Teresina managed thus to slough Arsang off on Fred.

"What do you think the trouble is?" she asked, half fearfully.

Marie spread her hands. She was small, brown-haired, vivacious, the blue kirtle and red tights of her uniform pleasingly stretched by a more than adequate figure. "Oh, la, Ma'm'selle, it is not to say. As the captain announced, some little trouble. These alarms are not uncommon. One is always so vairry careful in space. An hour here we sit, maybe two hours, then it is all over with and they let us go again. And tomorrow all passengers get free champagne with dinner, to make the apology."

"Oh." Teresina relaxed. She achieved a timid greeting across the aisle to the other two humans, Kamala Chatterji and Hedwig Trumbull. The latter was making steam-whistle noises of indignation. Kamala answered with soothing admonitions to seek peace of personality.

Teresina remembered that the Indian girl was bound for Xenophon at her own expense (which she could well afford) as an Inner Reformatist missionary. She was quite beautiful, in a dark dignified

way; her pink sari enhanced a slim form. In fact, Hedwig Trumbull was the only female in this boat who was not better looking than average. Teresina recalled that Hedwig had traded assignments with a stunning redhead . . . in hopes of a chance at the handsome crewman who was—

Footsteps clacked in the airlock. Third Mate Newhouse strolled in, balanced on his heels, and grinned around an impudently cocked cigaret. "All comfy?" he said.

"Where's our pilot?" demanded the Trumbull.

Newhouse grimaced faintly in her direction and turned eyes on her more decorative seatmate. "A slight reshuffling," he said. "I had reason to think the trouble would require some electronics work, so I ordered Mr. Manfred to stand by in the shop. He's the electronician's mate, you know. And then, naturally, I had to take his place in your boat."

Hedwig simpered. "A fair exchange, I'm sure." She was on the dumpy and dish-faced side, fashionably gowned, hair dyed green according to the very latest mode. She was also a spinster verging on desperation. Teresina realized that

her own sufferings before Arsang were perhaps matched by those of one or two eligible bachelors on the cruise.

"Oh, this is simply thrilling!" warbled Hedwig.

"Peace is all," said Kamala. "One begins on the mundane level with relaxation techniques."

"—the current status of the quiggsharfen trade is, of course, determined by the following factors," said Arsang, droning on as usual.

"Fortunately," said Fred, "I discovered a new Terrestrial poet, the singer of largeness, of democracy, of, in short, non-decadence. I refer to Mr. Walt Whitman."

Marie cocked a suspicious eye at Newhouse. "And what reasons had you, M'sieur, for this action?" she inquired.

"I'm the officer here, Miss Quesnay," huffed Newhouse. Quickly, bowing: "Though I have never before had so charming a crew member under me." His glance lit on Arsang. "Hey, there! What are you doing—"

Teresina closed her eyes and tried to pass the time by mentally integrating $e^x \log^2 x \, dx$.

Something buzzed. Newhouse spun on his heel. "Lord have mercy!" he cried, and vanished forward. The door

to the pilot turret slammed behind him.

Seconds later, a giant's fist slammed Teresina against her seat. She heard screams, but they seemed infinitely far away. The universe bellowed and pinwheeled around her.

Steadiness came again. Pseudogravity made a floor. Newhouse reached out in a blind automatic fashion and opened the pilot door. Beyond his seated form, Teresina saw an insane whirling in the viewscreens. It steadied as their circuits compensated for spin, aberration, and Doppler effect. She looked into naked space. The immense form of the space liner bulked momentarily against the stars. It vanished before she had drawn another breath.

Newhouse came back from his inspection. The passengers stared at him out of a thickened silence.

He held up a small hay-wired object. Teresina recognized relays, resistances, and a time switch. "This is it," he said grimly.

"This is what? Do be more explicit," said Arsang, spoiling the whole effect.

"Now, now," soothed Fred, "let Third Mate Newhouse explain in his own words. I, though fetterless, large and

various as the people itself, great sprawling clam'rous unsanitary body of Democracy, will hark to the singing mechanic, blithe and strong."

"Quiet!" roared Newhouse. More softly: "If you please. This is a serious matter. We are in danger of our lives."

"Ohh!" wailed Hedwig. She leaped from her chair and flung herself at Newhouse. He was caught off balance. They went down together in a heap. "Save me!" she yammered.

Kamala tugged vainly at her gown, saying, "Peace of soul, peace is all." Fred tried to help, but couldn't push past the crowding humans in the aisle. It was Marie Quesnay who muttered something like "*Nom d'une vieille vache!*" and applied a few brisk swats with the hand to the indicated part of Hedwig. While the various untanglements, tears, recriminations, and soothing went on, Teresina crouched back in her own seat.

Great Gauss, she thought in horror, *what am I trapped into?*

Arsang tugged her sleeve. "I see you have the good sense to remain clear of that disgraceful melee," he said. "Congratulations. You are almost Numan. Numa is, of course, the name of my plan-

et, Betelgeuse Eight, in the principal language of my country, the United States of Korlaband. I do not say your mind is quite on a level with, say, that of a baron or a knight, or even a peasant (I use crude English equivalents) of the U.S.K., but you would not make a bad barbarian of the Ortip Highlands. You progress, Miss Fabian, you show distinct progress."

He was cut short by Newhouse, who bellowed down all others, smoothed his own hair and dignity, and said in a quick harsh voice:

"I found this gimmick hooked into the control circuit of the release mechanism. Obviously there's been sabotage. Doubtless the ship's alarms were tampered with also, to get us aboard this boat at the time it was scheduled to be thrown free. The communication circuit to the ship has been left open. This means our departure didn't register. They don't know we are missing. Since I'm not normally on duty at this time, they probably won't notice we're gone for hours."

"I should think," said Kamala Chatterji with a calm approaching boredom, "that we could follow the ship."

"Oh, we can try," said Newhouse gloomily. "But the

top secondary speed of this boat is about 500 lights. The ship is going nearly 2,000: we don't share that any longer, now when we're out of its drive field. Furthermore, we've no measurable chance of pursuing it in its own precise track. Imagine us deviating by, oh, ten degrees, which is conservative. Imagine then turning around when they miss us, but having no idea of the time at which we left. At speeds like that, can you visualize the volume of space they'd have to search? It's hopeless."

Hedwig Trumbull huffed. "I must say, if this is someone's idea of a joke, it is very childish," she exclaimed. "I am sure this is all the company's fault, for not giving psychiatric tests before selling tickets. Now we shall have to limp off to some miserable colonial world, and wait weeks until—"

Newhouse set his face into still bleaker, though handsome, lines. "I'm afraid it is sabotage," he said. "For purposes of murder."

"Oh, no," whispered Tere-sina. "That's impossible. No one would—"

"Every spacecraft is supposed to carry a pilot's manual with navigation tables,"

said Newhouse. "Ours is missing."

"What?" yelped Fred. It is something to hear a yelp in basso profundo, but no one appreciated the experience very much.

Newhouse waved a hand at the turret viewport, visible through the open door. "Look at all those stars," he said. "This boat carries supplies for about six months, in which time it could go a distance of some 250 light-years. Do you know how many stars lie in that small radius? I estimate it at ten million. No one can remember the coordinates of so many—or even of the rather small percentage which has thus far been visited, let alone explored or colonized. I can identify a few super-brilliant giants, such as Rigel, but they're much too far for us to reach. Out in a little-known, thinly settled wilderness like this, you're completely dependent on your navigator's bible. And ours is missing!"

For a while, even Arsang was silent.

"We could look—" offered Teresina at last.

"From star to star? That's precisely what we must do," said Newhouse. "But don't get your hopes up. We'll try G-type suns within a reason-

able range, but the probability of our hitting one with a settled planet is so small we might as well forget it."

"A planet which is habitable, though, M'sieur?" asked Marie. "I would be satisfied with that, perhaps, me."

Newhouse shrugged. "If you know any prayers, I advise you to say them."

There were plenty of stars near the middle of the main sequence. There generally are. Newhouse used the pilot instruments, including a spectroscope and a luminosity meter, for a while. Then he swung the boat around and kicked it into full secondary drive.

"I picked a sun largely at random," he said. "All I had to go by was that it should be roughly Sol-type and not too far away. You see, only humans have been pioneering this region, and they'd pick such stars. If we don't find them but do find a comfortable planet, our nonhuman friends here will like it too, though the sunlight may have a peculiar color to them. I can't say just how long it'll take us to get there. The shape of a line-of-sight approach curve depends on such things as the star's intrinsic velocity, which I can't deter-

mine accurately. But it shouldn't be more than about ten Earth-days. Meanwhile, we may as well relax and let the autopilot do the work."

"*Could it be one of the colonized stars?*" asked Kamala hopefully.

"Of course not!" shrilled Arsang. "Who ever heard of colonizing a star? The imprecision of you lesser races! Might it have a colonized planet, Newhouse?"

"I told you, who knows?" shrugged the officer. "The chances are immensely against it, though. They're not quite so much against a habitable world: one which may even have been visited once, be on record in the Survey files. But if it has aborigines—or simply if no one has gotten around to starting a settlement there—it might not be visited again for a century." He smiled. "It's a bit crowded in the turret, but if you want to join me there, one by one, I can point out our destination. Er . . . all but you, Mr. Fred, I'm afraid."

"What does it matter?" said the large being in a cheerful tone. "I, Fred, transcend pettiness, I, standing and yodeling on the island Mannahatta (it's really a spaceboat, but that's not very euphonious) I see the brawl-

ing westward swarm, I, myself, me, Fred."

Marie accepted the invitation. The door closed behind her and Newhouse. There was a scuffling sound, a slap, and Marie stamped out saying things which made Teresina glad her own French was so limited. Newhouse rubbed his cheek, grinned brashly, and said: "Next."

The grin faded as Hedwig Trumbull pushed her way down the aisle. He carefully left the door open this time. She closed it. There was a sound of more scuffling and Newhouse emerged, looking hunted.

Arsang rapped for order with a three-fingered fist. "Silence!" he squealed. "Quiet! Listen! Attend! Conference!" When he had them looking at him, he swiveled large green eyes from one to another and said angrily: "We have not yet determined who is responsible for this outrage. At a time when the Lord High Gongbeater to the Prideful Court of His Awe-Inspiring Refulgence has been shanghaied, yes, I shall use strong language, kidnapped, I say, with murderous intent, from a mission of vital importance, I could well say of galactic implications, namely the regu-

lation of the quiggsharfen trade, at such a time it is no time to waste time staring at insignificant stars!"

"I don't recall that you were even supposed to be on this boat," clipped Newhouse.

"That has nothing to do with it!" yelled Arsang, turning saffron.

Teresina overcame shyness enough to say, "Yes, it does seem strange. Someone must have wanted to get rid of one of us, I mean, isn't that probable? Maybe?"

Newhouse bowed. "It's impossible that anyone could have wanted to be rid of you, Miss Fabian," he purred.

"Now wait," said Kamala Chatterji. Her voice and the dark aristocratic face seemed unusually down-to-earth. (No, not that, thought Teresina; no such luck.) "The point is well taken. It is hard to see why anyone would do such a thing, except to eliminate a person expected to be on this lifeboat. From civilization, at least, if not from the present plane of existence. That leaves out Mr. Arsang and Mr. Newhouse as intended victims; they only came aboard at the last minute."

"Me?" Marie Quesnay shrugged. "No one would get so angry with one little space-

ship stewardess, *n'est-ce-pas*? Or if so—ah, I do remember one Raoul in Marseilles, that was the episode of excitement!—he would surely not elect this cold-blooded means." She nodded at Teresina. "Are you not in a like situation, Ma'm'selle Fabian?"

Teresina nodded back, ruefully. "Even more so." She wondered with a certain wistfulness how girls got involved in the episodes of excitement. She had been snowbound with a boy in a ski cabin once, when they were about fifteen, but he had been so terrified of her they scarcely exchanged a word. Then there was her present dilemma, but to date it had only involved sitting in a cushioned recoil chair.

"And Ma'm'selle Trumbull," continued Marie.

"Well," simpered Hedwig, "I won't say there haven't been men who might—"

"But not with all this sabotage and danger to innocent people. It would be so much simpler to stuff you out an airlock," said Marie rather yearningly.

All eyes moved to Fred, who blushed and murmured, "Oh, now!"

"I don't believe I remember your name," said Hedwig.

"Fred."

"What?"

"Fred. A perfectly good name in the language of my nation. Why shouldn't it be?" His annoyance moderated, Fred continued: "I am a citizen of the Gombar Road. My world we call Kefflach. It is the second planet of the star Groombridge 1830."

"And were you on some important mission?" asked Newhouse.

"I certainly was!" Fred erected his comb and switched his tufted tail. "I was studying Terrestrial poetry."

"Oh."

"You don't understand. At our last national election, the Poetic Party won a clear victory. The Prosaicists retained hardly a dozen saddles in the Assembly."

"Even so—" Newhouse looked back to Kamala with rather more pleasure. "That seems to leave you, Miss Chatterji."

The Indian girl frowned, thoughtful rather than disturbed. "I cannot make logic out of that proposition," she said.

"Speaking about propositions—" Newhouse shut his mouth hastily.

"My family in Calcutta has money," went on Kamala, "but what is the use of kidnapping me with no prospect of returning me? I am engag-

ed in missionary work for the Inner Reformist movement, but that is not likely to arouse fanatical opposition, since one of our major tenets is that all creeds are equally acceptable."

"But there must be some reason—" began Marie.

"Indeed," said Kamala, ignoring her, "creed is irrelevant, except in the universals common to all, such as charity and peace of self. We do, to be sure, rely on the much misunderstood concept of Nirvana, but in somewhat the same sense as Zen Buddhism, in fact still more so, and hence our ideal of oneness with reality is by no means incompatible with, say, Judaeo-Christo-Moslem eschatology, Hindu poly-panteism, Confucian—"

"I see," interrupted Newhouse.

"—ethics, and so on. You certainly do not see, and since there are, as you say, days to wait before we approach our destination, you all have an unparalleled opportunity to attain a degree of enlightenment. Now to begin with first principles, consider—"

The star had changed from a point of light to a blaze when Newhouse switched over to sublight primary drive. He locked himself in the pilot's

turret and forbade interruptions, though it would take some hours to close in on the possibly Terrestroid planet his instruments had registered.

Teresina leaned back wearily and stared at a blank wall. It had been a bad ten days. In retrospect it hazed into a nightmare of monotony and petty bickering. Were it not for Marie, who organized enough activities to keep thought at bay, God knew what would have happened. Now, though, nothing remained but a waiting and the hope that someone's overloaded nerves wouldn't snap.

Such as my own, thought Teresina.

Tension led to silence, and silence was a blessing she had never fully appreciated before. Not even Arsang was as bad as that eternal female clack-clack-clack. Fred's bass and Newhouse's baritone had been such a relief she could have wept to listen. It was wonderful, she reflected, that men had deep voices. Otherwise the human race would long ago have died out . . . She choked off that train of thought in a hurry, jumped back to her Wisconsin girlhood (no, that wouldn't do either, it brought the tears too

close to the surface), her college and the intoxication of really learning, the times they sat up all night drinking beer and settling the problems of the universe, the unbelievable day when notification came, she could go to Xenophon University for a year, teach, study, see a new planet and get paid for doing so— It all seemed wonderful then.

And now what? Teresina plugged astrographical statistics into the laws of probability. The usual cheerless answer came out. The star ahead definitely had planets. There was a reasonably good chance that one would lie in a more or less Terrestroid radiation zone. (But a few degrees of average temperature either way could make for frightful danger and discomfort.) The chance was not bad that it would be of roughly Earth's mass. (However, the long-range effects of a gravity or air pressure different by more than, say, 25 per cent from that for which man was evolved, were not pleasant to contemplate.) There was a fair probability of protoplasmic, photo-synthesizing life, leading to an oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere. Granted such a biochemistry, there was a smaller likelihood that it would be close enough to her own so that she could walk

around freely and eat most of the native species.

The trouble was, mathematical law is so inconsiderate as to decree that such probabilities must be multiplied together to get a net result. That still left quite a few planets hospitable to man, even in this one arm of the galaxy. But the individual chance of stumbling on one was somewhere below a single percent.

Wherefore the lifeboat would doubtless make a hasty survey and then start out again for another star; and after that another, and then another; and finally the supplies would all be eaten, though the searchers would have gone crazy long before then—

I will not think this way. Teresina thrust out a small firm chin and began a resolute mental integration of $\log \log \tan (x^3 - k) dx$.

Marie, beside her, smiled wryly and made a thumbs-up sign. "Bon," she murmured.

And the hours passed. Teresina had almost dozed off when Newhouse's voice came from the intercom to jar her conscious: "We're very close to the planet— No, stay where you are. I can't be bothered now, it's dangerous.

I'm making a tight approach curve, taking readings as I go. Don't get your hopes up too much, but it's definitely Earth-like. Mass, surface gravity, gross atmospheric composition; mean overall temperature a little higher, but the subarctic regions should be ideal for—"

"I want to see!" Hedwig leaped to her feet.

"No, I said!" cried Newhouse. "There's something wrong, a flutter in the meter readings. I didn't want to scare you by admitting it, but there is. I haven't the engineering skill to—I'm going to land. It's either that or risk hanging in orbit with a burned-out primary."

"Is it civilized?" whistled Arsang. "I do not mean, is it civilized to hang in orbit, for certainly that is not the case. Nor do I ask if the place itself is civilized, since I know that the United States of Korlaband has no extraplanetary colonies. But do you see any trace of intelligent life?"

"No interstellar colonists," said Newhouse. "The neutrino detector would register their atomic energy plant if that were the case. I haven't seen anything in the viewscreens either—no trace of native culture— Our path will carry us clear around the globe and I'll

keep watching. But I'm afraid the chances are against any highly developed autochthones."

"Just to set down, though," whispered Teresina. "To get outdoors!"

"And we will still have the boat," Marie reminded eagerly. "If we can establish a base here, we can make expeditions to other stars, hoping in time to find—"

"If the boat hangs together!" Newhouse's voice harshened. "I don't want to frighten you, but the deeper we get into this gravity field, the more the meters are fluttering. Perhaps our saboteur was more thorough than I realized."

"Ohhh!" shrieked Hedwig.

"Do be quiet," said Kamala. "How can our pilot have the requisite inner peace to land successfully under such a handicap, if you fail to show confidence in him?"

"Oh, I'm confident enough in him, dearie," blubbered Hedwig. "It's the machinery that I don't trust."

Kamala frowned. "It is true," she admitted, "that a means of giving inward serenity to a machine has not yet been discovered."

Presently a thin keening sounded through the walls. It became a roar, and Teresina

felt waves of frictional heat. Pseudograv could not smooth out all the jerking and buffeting which rocked the boat. "I know it's a lousy landing!" Newhouse called once, raggedly. "But the primary drive is going to pieces! I haven't any more control over the phasing!"

And then at last there was an impact which smacked teeth together, a blunt roar, a scorched smell, and silence.

A wide green valley, where flowers nodded in grass and trees murmured under a gentle wind, swept past a river to forested hills. The sun was a wheel of gold, low in a sky blue and dizzyingly tall, white clouds scudded, birds were a brightness that swooped and darted overhead. Distantly could be seen a herd of animals slender and burning red, with proud horns.

Teresina sighed. "It could almost be Wisconsin."

"Long ago, however," added Fred. "Back when the great pullulating, or perhaps ululating, tide of America which I, Fred of Groombridge 1830 II, sing, had not yet swept west, O pioneers!"

"I know it's wrong of me," said Teresina. "I should be frightened or miserable or something, if only on Mother's

'and Dad's account." She shook her yellow tresses loose to the wind. "But I'm happy!" After a moment she decided: "I suppose it's due to the exercise and fresh air."

They topped a long ridge and saw the spaceboat flash metallic below them. John Jacob Newhouse came hurrying as the girl and the Kefflachian strode downward. His hair was rumpled and his shirt stained with grease. "What kept you?" he puffed. "I was about to organize a search party. I thought you two were only going to look around a little."

"We did," said Teresina, "and it's unbelievably beautiful. Fertile, too. If they're only edible, we'll have more nuts and berries and wild grains and game than they have in Wisconsin."

"They are. I've had the analyzers from our survival kit working hard," said Newhouse. "Naturally, we'll want to test an individual specimen of everything before eating it; and doubtless we'll need a larger variety of foods here than we would on Earth, to get all the vitamins and so on. But it's already obvious that this is our kind of biochemistry."

Fred rolled small devout eyes downward. The gods of

the Gombar Road are chthonic. "A miracle," he said.

Newhouse caught Teresina's hands. "But you were gone so long!" he protested.

"Oh?" The girl felt confused. "I didn't have a watch . . . No, it can't be. The sun has hardly moved."

"2° 36' 14"," said Fred.

Newhouse started. "What? Can you gauge it that close?"

"Why, of course," said the Groombridgean, astonished. "Can't everybody?"

"You've been away more than four hours," said Newhouse, turning back to the girl.

"Good Euler! I must have—" Teresina realized Newhouse was still holding her hands. She jerked them back. Angrily: "I don't see what difference it makes to you!"

"Ah, much, my dear." The man smiled and fell into step with her. "We must all stick close together now. Very close."

"I'm sure Fred could have handled anything dangerous."

"Quite likely." Newhouse ran an approving eye along the gigantic centauroid form.

"We're going to be glad that Mr. Fred is with us. We'll need his strength."

"What do you—Wait!" Ter-

esina stopped dead. The blood seemed to drain from her. "Do you mean the boat—"

"Beyond repair," sighed Newhouse. "The central polyphasic of the primary drive has been so mangled we were lucky to get down before it blew out altogether. We've no facilities for making a replacement, even if any of us knew how."

"But—I mean—the secondary—"

"It's all right. That does us no good now, though. You must know we can't try quantum-jumping a mass as great as a spaceboat, or a man, faster than light, when we're this deep in a gravitational field. Not unless we want to commit suicide. And without a primary, we can't get off the ground and into space." Newhouse paused a moment, then added: "The radio is sabotaged too."

"But—why—"

"The saboteur, of course. Whoever wanted to get rid of one of us. Wrecking the radio was an added precaution. If we landed safely on a planet where we could live . . . as we've done, in defiance of probability . . . we might have a faint hope that a search party would come past. The chances are all against that, you realize. No one will know

which way we headed; there are so many stars; our *prima facie* chance of survival was so small that they won't spend much time looking. But if we had a radio, we could keep it tuned, and if ever we picked up a signal, we could answer. Now even that tiny possibility has been eliminated. Suppose a rescue vessel should chance on this planet, what is the likelihood of its detecting a flyspeck like our camp by visual means?"

Teresina closed her eyes. When she opened them again, the landscape was blurred for a while.

Fred, who seemed more phlegmatic than most humans, except where poetry was concerned, rumbled calmly: "Is there any trace of native civilization, Mr. Newhouse?"

"I saw nothing in the view-screens that looked like a road or a city or even like cultivated fields," replied the officer. "If anything exists, it must be on a low paleolithic level, no use to us. We're on our own."

"What conditions can we expect?"

"Favorable. I took care to land in an area whose climate would be good for our type of life. It's near the vernal equi-

nox, so we have summer ahead of us. But as the axial tilt is only some 10 degrees, even the winter will be mild, little more than a rainy season. As you've seen, this world rotates very slowly, the period is more than three Terrestrial weeks. But the nights won't be terribly dark, even if there isn't a moon. This is a rather thickly starred region of space, a loose cluster. Also, we're in a high latitude, the planet has a strong magnetic field, and it's closer to its sun than Earth—so we can expect some brilliant auroral displays the year 'round. In short, we'll be able to see what we're about after sunset. And as I said, we'll have no trouble about food. We'll practice agriculture, but won't have to work unduly hard at it."

"Have we tools?"

"Yes, a good assortment, including some guns. Terrestrial seeds, too, in biostatic containers. Regulation survival equipment. Though as far as I know, this is the first time any tourists have ever had need of it."

They were close to the boat now. Newhouse waved at the others. Marie, fed up with the petulant incompetence of Hedwig and Arsang, had taken a hatchet and

chopped some firewood herself; Kamala had a small blaze going, and the smell from a kettle suspended above was savory. Teresina realized with a jolt how hungry she was.

"We can bunk in the craft as long as need be," said Newhouse, "but of course we'd like more space and comfort. Tomorrow—I mean later today, local time!—suppose we set up the crane and the power saw. We can erect a very comfortable log cabin, with a private room for everybody, in a week or so. Next sunrise we can begin some basic farming. Why, in a few months we'll all be living like kings!"

"What kind of kings?" asked Fred suspiciously. "I know some tribes on Kefflach who sacrifice the king every harvest season."

"Oh," said Newhouse, "it was only a figure—"

"Not to mention those which have been infected with republicanism and are starting revolutions against their monarchies."

"—a figure of speech—"

"And then there is the King of the Venruth Way. He's always in debt. He can't walk two steps without some moneylender seizing him by

the tail and demanding repayment."

"Forget it!"

"And poor old King Horrok of the Jungar Trail. He's expected to lead his warriors in battle, and he's *such* a coward, and the expensive psychiatrist he imported from Earth got so interested in the symbolism of a nomadic civilization that—"

"Never mind! Never mind!"

"Is it any wonder that I sing the spaciousness of Democracy, I, Fred, contained in all and all-containing, warm and unwashed as the veritable mob?"

Suddenly Teresina giggled.

Life looked more hopeful after a sleep period. The sun remained at late afternoon, the same low winds blew the same woolly clouds, but grief, anger, and hysterics were over with. It was almost a calm group which met outside the boat when breakfast was done.

Newhouse mounted the second rung of the access ladder and looked down on the others, who sat or stood in tree-shaded grass. He made a dashing figure, his hair rumpled by the breeze, shirt open, pants skin-tight above gleaming boots. Teresina suspected he had put in half an hour or

better achieving the effect. At least, that was the only way she could account for the riding boots, on a planet without horses.

"Ladies and gentlebeings," said Newhouse in his most vibrant voice. "You know now that we're probably here for the rest of our lives. You know how lucky we've been in finding such a Garden of Eden as this. It's up to us to deserve that luck, to be worthy of the human race."

"And the Numan race," piped Arsang.

"Of course," said Newhouse, annoyed. "I wasn't forgetting the Kefflachian race either. But, well, anyhow, to continue. We can make what we will of this planet. Right now we're a community with no definite authority, no clear-cut legal rights, no . . . uh . . . anything. We have work to do. It won't be back-breaking. We have basic power tools, and the boat's converter will supply all the energy we can ever use. But it will be work. A challenge!" he cried, trumpet-like.

"You needn't shout," said Kamala. "We are not deaf."

Newhouse looked disconcerted, smoothed it over, and resumed swiftly: "We have to agree, maybe not on anything as elaborate as a constitution,

but on a few rules. The way we start will determine the tradition, the whole structure, of our society in the future. Our descendants can bless us or curse us—"

"*Une pause!*" Marie leaped to her feet. "What is that it is that which you say? Whose descendants?"

Newhouse folded his arms, leaned back against the ladder, and smiled. "Ours. Yours and the other ladies'. And mine."

"Ohhh!" quavered Hedwig pinkly.

Teresina jumped up also. "Now wait a minute, Newhouse!" she yelled, and stopped, appalled at her own boldness.

"You know the law," said the officer.

"What law?" asked Kamala through an otherwise stunned silence.

"Number 298376, Statutes of the United Commonwealths," said Newhouse.

The girl shook her dark head. "I never heard of it, and my father has held a seat in Parliament since—"

"Popularly known as the Reproductive Act."

"No, I can't say—"

Teresina exchanged glances with Marie. The stewardess shrugged and made a face.

Who could keep track of all the laws there were?

"I imagine it isn't too familiar to civilians at that," said Newhouse. "Spacemen are of course very much aware of it, though even in their case the issue seldom arises. But, briefly, the law requires that Terrestrial citizens cast away on any planet where reproduction is at all practical must reproduce, and in such a way as to assure the greatest distribution of all available sound heredity."

Teresina shrank back against the comforting bulk of Fred. Newhouse swept a grin across her.

"But this is outrageous!" screamed Hedwig Trumbull. "Indecent!"

"Conditions in space don't always permit the same behavior as at home," said Newhouse blandly. "The law has several purposes. First, since any band of castaways is sure to be small, inbreeding has to be avoided as much as possible, lest the descendants start degenerating in a century or two. There has to be as much genetic variety made available as circumstances allow: interbreeding in all individual combinations. Second, by enforcing reproduction, the law makes use even of disasters like this one to spread civi-

lization throughout the galaxy. By the time our world is discovered, for instance, there may be quite a flourishing colony. Third, it's for your own protection. Do you want to be the last survivor, growing old with no one to take care of you?"

"But—marriages—" objected Kamala.

"They're all automatically annulled," said Newhouse, "though all children born are automatically legitimate."

"Somehow," complained Ar-sang, "the logic of this escapes me."

"Anyway, none of us are married." Newhouse leered. "Yet."

"I will not do it!" exploded Marie. "You—*jeune bouc!*" When he didn't seem impressed, she translated: "Young goat."

The officer said sternly: "There's a severe penalty for non-compliance, Miss Ques-nay."

"But I thought no one was going to rescue us," said Tere-sina.

"If we are rescued, the penalties will apply. Besides . . . well, let's face it, I am the only man for God knows how many parsecs." Newhouse buffed his nails on his shirt, regarded them critically, and smiled again.

"It's outrageous!" Hedwig waddled toward him, shaking her fists. "It's indecent, I say, immoral, improper! When do you start?"

Newhouse's composure melted a little. "Oh," he said.

Hedwig fluffed her green hair, revealing gray roots. "I want it known that I am complying only under protest," she said. "Furthermore, if we should be rescued, you must make an honest woman of me, that is understood."

"Well," said Newhouse, jumping down from the ladder and backing away, "let's not be hasty. I, er, didn't want to embarrass any of you ladies. I know you'll, uh, need time to get used to this. To the idea. I'll t-t-talk to you separately . . . later. . . ."

"Don't think I am afraid," said Hedwig. "I am prepared to do my duty to civilization, however distasteful."

"Fred," gabbled Newhouse, "we'd better start unloading those power tools. Right away."

Since there was nothing obviously dangerous in the neighborhood, Teresina was handed a light rifle just in case and a basket for specimens of potential edibles, to be brought back and analyzed. She was out for some hours,

more grateful to be alone than she dared admit.

Returning through the sun-spattered shade of a little wood, bird song overhead and soft leaf mould underfoot, she felt tired enough to put down alertness. She had plenty of samples, no reason to keep an eye out for more. But that, she soon discovered, was a mistake: she began thinking about her own situation.

It looked bleaker by the minute. You could make this damned planet as idyllic as you liked, it was still a jail. She had thought herself asocial, not really unfriendly but fonder than average of curling up with a book in the evening. She had imagined her own interests were centered on analysis situs and the theory of equations. Only now did she realize how much she had been a part of society—how much everyone is—from tea-time chitchat to night-long argument, from stranger in the street to lifetime friend—and the whole structure of society, not so much its buildings and machines as its books, paintings, concerts . . . Great Lagrange! She thought of herself as a mathematician, but without a reference library and at least one monthly journal she *wasn't*. . . . She shivered in the knowledge.

Camping and hiking and so on, she thought with a swing back from terror to resentment, were fun as a hobby. As a career, they had no appeal.

A rustling ahead made her snatch for the rifle. "Hey, what have I done?" grinned Newhouse, emerging from a screen of brush.

Teresina slung the weapon back over her shoulder. "What are you doing?" she blurted. Her heart didn't stop jumping.

"Is that a shift of emphasis?" He fell into step beside her. "Why, we called it a day, or work period, or whatever the term is under these crazy conditions, back at the camp. So I thought I'd stroll out and see if I could meet you."

Teresina's face burned. "It's a big area. The chances were against finding me."

"I'm a great one for lopping the odds," chuckled Newhouse. He tapped a small instrument hung at his belt. "You are carrying an energy compass, one that will pick up the weak steady emission from the boat's converter. I simply tuned this one to yours. Ahem! Speaking of pick-ups—"

"Why—What. . . ."

"Why? You yourself are the answer to that." Newhouse

slipped an arm about her waist.

Teresina jerked free. "Stop that!"

He laughed aloud, not in the least abashed. "All right, I won't be the big bad wolf. Not yet. Though if I chose to be, there wouldn't be much you could do about it, would there?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, as I've remarked before, I'm the only human male around. And you are not a girl who'd defy the law."

"Oh," Teresina looked away. "The law."

Newhouse moved up behind her. "Don't be bitter. Am I so horrible?"

Teresina struggled to speak. She still faced away from him when she got out: "No."

"Ah," said Newhouse and laid his hands on her waist.

Teresina continued, word by dogged word: "It isn't personal. Not much. It's the, the general idea of it all."

"Now, wait," purred Newhouse, nuzzling her hair. "Don't fool yourself. I know the female of our species fairly well, if I do say so, and I could tell right away you aren't cold. Reserved, a blue-stocking type, sure, but underneath everything, very much a woman."

Teresina stared down rustling leafy arches. "I always expected to get married," she said. She could only think how hard it was to talk so freely about herself to a near stranger. The subject matter seemed almost irrelevant by contrast. "Yes, of course. But I meant *married*."

"If it's that you're worried about, I've explained the law—"

"Yes, and of all the stupid, vicious laws there ever were . . . I'm not interested in what some damned Act of Parliament says. I was talking about marriage. A relationship between me and one man, for all our lives; something that was ours alone. I don't mean I'd be possessive. I hope not. But, well, I suppose I am a monogamist."

"However, since things have worked out otherwise—" Newhouse snuggled her close against him. "What was it George Bernard Shaw wrote, centuries ago?" he said complacently. "A woman would rather have part of a superior man than all of an inferior one."

"What?"

"Being the only man, I think I can safely call myself superior. Believe me, lass, I'd far rather have been abandoned alone with you. But

even as it is, we could get quite abandoned, the two of us—"

Teresina realized, like a fist in her stomach, how she was being held. She tried to jerk free. Newhouse laughed again and held her tightly. She couldn't break away. He swung her around to face him and lowered his lips toward hers.

She smacked his nose with her forehead.

He let go and staggered back, gasping. She unlimbered her rifle. "I don't want to shoot you," she choked. "Please don't make me." Hastily: "I mean, please don't force me to shoot!"

Newhouse dabbed at his nose. "Put that thing away," he groaned. "You want to commit murder?"

Her pulse hammered, but she felt an upsurge of strength and self-command, i.e., adrenalin. "And what you were about to commit?" she snapped.

"My lawful duty," said Newhouse with as great an air of virtue as possible when one has a nosebleed.

"To hell with that bleat," said Teresina, surprising herself. "To hell with that law, also. Do you think I'm so afraid of lonesomeness, now

or in my old age, that I'll sign up in your harem? Give me one good reason why I should help perpetuate *your* chromosomes!"

"The survival of this community," said Newhouse primly.

Teresina remembered a coarse Anglo-Saxon monosyllable she had encountered a few times on Earth. Experimentally, she pronounced it. Newhouse looked so delightfully shocked that she said it again. "Whatever bunch of old women in trousers wrote that law," she added, "they must be pretty abject not to have thought that survival isn't worth just any price whatsoever. Enough is enough, for Gauss' sake. Now, git!"

She jerked the rifle. Newhouse stumbled from her. He paused at the edge of a thicket. "What are you going to do?" he asked weakly.

"I'll come back to camp," said Teresina, "after I've cooled off. We needn't say any more about this episode."

Newhouse stood thinking for a moment. "I apologize," he said. "I didn't understand you as well as I thought."

"I suggest you be a little less confident you understand the others."

"But there is still the law.

And our group is basically law-abiding. If nothing else, they won't risk the penalties of compounding a felony, if we should be rescued; and that's what they'd be guilty of, if they allowed you to be this obstinate."

Teresina flung back so fast that only later did she have time to admire her own intelligence: "We can argue about that later. The law says this group has to reproduce. All right. It says nothing about the order in which we do so. In fact, it wouldn't be sensible to have all the women pregnant simultaneously. Very well, Mr. Newhouse, you can start elsewhere. When the first infant is well on its way, the issue will arise for the rest of us."

He gaped. "Elsewhere?"

"I suggest Hedwig Trumbull," sneered Teresina. "She seemed quite prepared to give her all for the colony."

Recognizing a perfect exit line, she turned her back on his appalled stare and marched off.

The slow sunset came during the next work period. For hours the sky burned red and hot gold. But while Teresina had always regretted the swift fading of such beauty on Earth, she found it rather

monotonous when it lasted half her waking time. Blue twilight, the earliest stars blinking to life, was downright welcome.

The party sat outside, under floodlamps rigged near the site of their planned house, and talked. Mostly it was reminiscence, Earth, friends, and do you think we'll ever see home again, until Hedwig began to snivel. Then Marie called rather sharply for a discussion of practical problems. Labor around the boat could continue through the long night, but it was best to suspend hunting and gathering operations. However, it would also be well to venture a ways into the forest, get some idea what to expect there after dark. Fred and Newhouse could . . . no, Newhouse must not be risked . . . Fred agreed amiably to do some exploring alone. He had little to fear. Teresina offered to accompany him. Newhouse vetoed it: she must not hazard her own germ plasm unnecessarily. Teresina bridled, spoke of her rights as an individual, and was dismayed when the others sided with Newhouse. Only Arsang voted for her, and that chiefly in a spiteful mood. He had been told off to gather berries earlier that session, and did not think it ac-

corded with the dignity of a Lord High Gongbeater.

Presently they all went to bed. Automatic alarms had been set up; there was no need to stand watches. Teresina noted maliciously that Newhouse was still retiring alone to his bunk in the boat. Hedwig made an insinuating remark, but he brushed very quickly past her and the door to the pilot turret was heard to slam shut. Arsang and Hedwig entered the passenger section, the rest preferred to stretch sleeping bags out in the mild night. All but Fred, of course: nothing could be done but hang blankets over him.

Teresina couldn't fall asleep. After an hour or two of twisting in the sack, she got up, donned sandals and cloak, and wandered toward camp limits.

It was now approaching true night. The sky was purple-black overhead. Stars crowded it in great blazing strings and clusters; this was indeed a fairly dense region of space; white auroral shimmers leaped noiselessly between the foreign constellations. Even without a moon, she could see how dew glittered in the grass, how the river flashed some kilometers off and the remote hills shoul-

dered upward. She could hear more noises than in the daytime, rustlings, patterings, whistlings, croakings, warblings, nocturnal life up and about its business. She thought vaguely that the daylight and starlight species must be more sharply divided here, more specialized, than on Earth . . . Strange that a planet otherwise so homelike should have so lazy a rotation. True, its sun was closer, tidal drag would operate. But that could not even affect the spin as much as Luna had slowed Earth: especially since this world was hardly older than her own and probably younger. Sol is rather old as Population One goes. The planet appeared to have no satellite, certainly none big enough to create significant drag. The normal distribution of angular momentum would presumably guarantee any moonless planet, not too close to its primary, a rotation period of no more than, say, a hundred hours. So what had slowed this globe down? . . . But its long luminous night was beautiful.

A closer sound brought Teresina whirling about. For a moment, in the vague tricky light, she stared terrified at a pair of tall black trolls. Then

they resolved themselves into Marie Quesnay and Kamala Chatterji, also cloaked.

"Hello," said Teresina, a little shakenly. The big darkness made all voices seem a whisper. "So you can't sleep either?"

"Why, are you suffering from insomnia, my dear?" asked Kamala. "I only came out to admire the view. While total inner peace is not easily attained, I can show you a simple relaxation technique which—"

"It is not to make the matter," interrupted Marie. "I too was tossing wakeful, and when I noticed you leave, Kamala, I got up and joined you. Then we saw you, Teresina."

"But if you will only," said the Indian girl, "begin by drawing a deep breath—"

"I do not—"

"—eleven times repeated, standing on your toes; then sit down, put your head between your thighs, cross your ankles—"

"I do not want to sleep!" exclaimed Marie. "It is that I have the thinking to do."

"Well, then I should not disturb you," said Kamala. "Good night."

"No, stay here. And you, Teresina. It is the thinking

we must all do, and we may as well talk it over now, *hein?*"

The cool breeze caressed Teresina's face and sizzled. She said lamely: "You mean . . . the problem of—"

"Of that *cochon* Newhouse, yes." Marie bit off her words. "He has made the pass at you too, no?"

"No. I mean yes. But I had a gun along, and—"

"And I know a few judo arts," said Marie. "In my work, that is always needful. Did he get you alone, Kamala?"

"Yes," answered the Indian girl serenely. "I discoursed to him on the Three Principles. I was starting to develop the Five Basic Philosophies from them when he said we had better get back to camp."

Marie giggled, "That is the easy way out, that."

"I told him," said Teresina, glad the darkness hid her embarrassment, "that he could, er, well, start with someone who was willing."

"And I the same," nodded Marie. "I think we both suggested the same person, no? Since his interest in her is, shall we say, not great, he is so far doing nothing." She shrugged. "But that will not last long, *mes amies*. He is a healthy young man, healthier

than average in some respects. If nothing else, he will follow our proposal. And then, a few months hence, he will have—a'em!—clear title to one of us."

"Just let him dare!" flared Teresina.

Kamala said gently: "He will have the extraterrestrials on his side. They will certainly desire a large community here, especially as a provision for their own old age. And there is the question of law, and even of duty."

"Duty! Law!" Teresina looked out to the river. Finally she spoke, hard-voiced:

"Has it occurred to you just how bad and stupid that law is? Go down the line, tick off the points one by one. First, it's a gross infringement of civil liberties. People have the constitutional right to decide what they'll make of their own lives. An enforced marriage isn't legally a marriage at all. Second, this kind of situation is so wildly improbable that there's no reason for a law regulating it. How sloppy are space crews supposed to be, anyhow? There's almost no excuse for getting marooned. Even explorers, Survey ships, don't head into the wild black yonder. They identify in advance the stars

they're going to visit, using astronomical telescopes. If they aren't back within a reasonable time, a rescue expedition will know where to search!"

"True," said Marie. "Although I am surprised that you, a civilian, know so much about Survey procedure."

"I don't, really," confessed Teresina. "I only reasoned it out, on the basic assumption that space explorers aren't stupid."

"Well," said Kamala, "this is indeed an unnecessary law, as you point out. But that sort of thing is not unknown. There are many regulations providing for the weirdest contingencies. For example, in one of the American states, I have heard it is illegal to take a bath by the side of the highway on Sunday mornings. So a law regulating castaways is not out of the pattern, even if I have never heard of a situation like ours arising before."

"All right," said Teresina. "Conceded. Fermat knows what will happen when an M.P. gets the bit between his teeth. But let's take this law at face value. It's supposed to guarantee that castaways of mixed sexes will reproduce, if at all possible. Really—" she felt herself blush again, but plowed stubbornly on—"do

you think that has to be *required*?

"The law is also supposed to prevent degeneration by enforcing the greatest outbreeding. Well, after all! I mean, if a band of people are so stupid they can't think of that for themselves, it doesn't matter if they degenerate or not, does it? They don't need to get all promiscuous in the first generation to take care of the genetic drift. All they have to do is regulate who their children and grandchildren marry, make marriage contracts between families. And that's been common practice throughout human history. Our modern custom of leaving it entirely up to the individual is the statistical abnormality."

"Hmm, yes," said Marie. "I can also see that if there were several couples shipwrecked together, and they were supposed to change partners all the time, *oui*, the emotional tensions that could make would be more dangerous than any genetic problems!"

"And then, that—" Teresina tried her Anglo-Saxon again. It seemed to fit, so she let it stand and continued: "—about spreading civilization. Really! If a planet has no natives, it can wait till it's

discovered in the usual way. If it does have natives, can you imagine how much trouble a band of aliens like us, calmly filling their land with our own offspring, would make? The explorers who finally did arrive would probably find a full-fledged war waiting for them. In fact, what the law ought to do is forbid reproduction, till the castaways are sure there aren't any aborigines!"

She fell silent. The wind murmured and the forest talked in the night.

Kamala said at last, "You are right, dear, it is a most ridiculous piece of legislation, and if I ever get home I shall certainly have my father introduce a bill to repeal it. But meanwhile—"

"Meanwhile," said Marie as Kamala's voice trailed off, "we have the situation as it is. Forget about the law. We have one man, four women, and no chance of rescue. I am afraid we shall have to agree with what he wants." Wryly: "As you say, the law it is not necessary at all."

"We don't have to!" cried Teresina.

Marie shrugged again. "I do not like M'sieur Newhouse very much. I will not fall into his arms at once. But sooner or later, *eh, bien*, I am a

healthy animal myself. And so are you two."

"I am not!" Teresina stamped her foot.

Kamala laughed. Teresina said awkwardly, "Well, I mean, I have some self-discipline."

"We all do, now," said Marie. "A year from now? Two years? Five? I have perhaps seen a little more of the life than you, *chérie*. If nothing else, you will not deny yourself children. And it is true, the community will need those children fifty years from now. You must not be selfish."

"You can delay the inevitable for some months," said Kamala. "During that time, I shall instruct you in Inner Reform. These things will seem much less important then."

"Don't you care?" choked Teresina.

Kamala hesitated. "There is a young man, in Calcutta . . . I was going to come back to him in a year, and—No!" With more violence than her principles allowed: "Forget it! It is past!"

"Cayley and Sylvester!" snarled Teresina. "If you had any will power whatsoever, you'd help me seize the boat! We could keep looking for a human settlement. Better die

trying than give up to this, this cotton candy planet!"

"You forget," said Marie, "the primary drive, she is sabotaged."

"Couldn't we fix it?"

"Not according to what Newhouse says. I have no knowledge of these matters, me. I could fly the boat in atmosphere, but I would not trust myself in space with it."

"What Newhouse says!" rasped Teresina. "How far would you trust that—that—" "Unintegrated personality," suggested Kamala.

"Cad!" said Teresina.

"Same thing, really," said Kamala.

"We may as well trust in him," said Marie. "He has such luck as never a man in all history. I would rather have a lucky man than a clever one."

"Luck—" Teresina stood as if smitten. Understanding was a thunderbolt.

"All the improbabilities do seem to have operated in his favor," agreed Kamala. "It implies that under his superficially superficial personality there lies some deep unconscious harmony with the All. Yes . . . yes, perhaps I have been unjust to him. I must get to know him better—"

Teresina grabbed Marie's hand. "Did you say you could fly the boat?" she yelled.

"Yes. A little," said the stewardess. "But what do you—you cannot—"

"The hell I can't!" Teresina whirled and started running downhill. "Come on!"

"*Qu'est - que - c'est - que - ça?*" gasped Marie. She stood an instant, then followed. "Kamala, help, she is gone *dérangé!*"

Fred roused at the noise and lumbered to meet the girls. "What has happened?" he boomed. "Is anything wrong, little ones?"

"Fred—Fred—" Teresina collapsed shaking against his enormous chest. "Y-y-you don't want to, to, stay here, do you?"

"No. Naturally not. Granted, it is a peaceful scene, but I anticipate an increasing loneliness for my own species. Somehow this planet seems to be lacking in the large, varied, raucous, perspiring qualities of En Masse."

"Well, then, come on!" shrieked Teresina.

Kamala reached her and tugged her arm. "Peace," she urged. "Do be calm, darling. Now just take a long breath."

Marie seized her other arm. "Do you wish a sedative?" she asked.

"I have been studying the recreational microfiles in the

boat," Fred rumbled on, "and have decided to take a course of music by Delius and poetry by James Whitcomb Riley."

Steps clanged in the airlock. Newhouse appeared, a pistol in his hand, Hedwig and Arsang behind him. "What is it?" called the man.

"I fear poor Teresina has lost the self-control," said Marie.

"What?" Newhouse hurried down the ladder. After a moment, Hedwig followed. Arsang slithered along, gave the tableau a disdainful look, and began explaining to Hedwig how much better things were regulated at the Prideful Court of H.A.R. Pipp XI.

Newhouse shouldered close. "What happened?" he said.

"She began to shout and run," answered Kamala. "The child is overwrought. Let me talk to her alone for a while and—"

"It isn't so!" wailed Teresina. The world trembled in her sight; the noise of her heart filled it with roaring. "The boat! You lied to us! The boat isn't damaged at all!"

"What?" Newhouse's mouth fell open.

"Listen," babbled Teresina, "listen to me for just one minute!"

Newhouse hefted his pistol.

"I think she is hysterical," he said. In the wan light, his face was drawn taut. "I'll take her off myself for a chat. I know how to handle these cases."

"No, it is me who have the training," said Marie.

"I'm the captain here!" snapped Newhouse.

Teresina looked at the gun in his fist. It was pointed squarely at her midriff. "Calm down, sweetheart," Newhouse went on. "Be quiet. Relax."

"What is this about the boat?" asked Fred.

"Nothing," said Newhouse. "Nothing at all. Right?" He and his gun looked hard at Teresina.

She never knew where the nerve came from. She kicked upward. Her foot struck his hand. The pistol went soaring off in an arc. Newhouse cursed and ran after it.

Teresina scrambled for the boat. "Come on! Let's go!" she screamed.

Newhouse was on his hands and knees, casting about in the long shadowed grass. Marie threw him a single look and scampered up the ladder. "Fred!" shouted Teresina. The Kefflachian snatched up Kamala and made it into the airlock in one jump.

Teresina was still below. She saw Newhouse straighten, the pistol a gleam in his grasp.

She had no idea whether he would actually use it or not, but her inwards grew cold and lumpy. Then Fred reached down a monster-long arm and hauled her up. The outer airlock valve clashed shut behind her.

She lay a moment gasping before she could say to Marie: "All right . . . go on to the turret—raise ship quickly . . . no time to waste."

The stewardess looked at the closed valve, as if to watch the scene beyond. "But Hedwig and Arsang," she said. "Alone with him—"

"He won't dare harm them now. If he ever really intended to." Teresina sat up, shivering, hugging her knees. "They have all the supplies and tools and things. It won't hurt them to wait a while."

Unexpectedly, Kamala grinned. "I cannot think of any three persons I would rather see stranded together," she said.

Sir John Baskerville, legal officer (as well as chief chemist, assistant medico, and Masonic lodgemaster) of Irene, only town on the planet Holmes, stared in astonishment at the beautiful blonde girl on the other side of his desk.

"But this is fantastic!" he

exclaimed. "How did you ever deduce it was a hoax?"

"Oh, everything," said Teresina Fabian. "I mean, the whole sabotage business did seem so unlikely. No one could think of a good reason for it. And clumsy, too! Why not just a bomb in the boat and make sure of us? And then the chances were so grossly against our finding a planet as good as this."

"Thank you," bowed Sir John. "Frankly, we on Holmes agree, though our neighbors and friendly rivals on Watson—But continue."

"Newhouse, being the third officer, could have arranged lifeboat assignments any way he wanted, within limits," said Teresina. "The original party in Fourteen was four young ladies, all unattached, and, well, at least he thought they were attractive. And then Fred, whose strength would be useful and who wouldn't be a rival. Of course, Newhouse's plans were somewhat thrown akilter. First Miss Trumbull traded places with a very cute redhead he had lined up for our boat. Then Arsang forced himself aboard. But that wasn't too serious. He went ahead. It would have been easy for him to put a timer in the ship's alarm cir-

cuit, one that would sound the bells when he wanted. He could also have cut off our boat's communication circuit to the ship. He didn't even have to put another timer in our release mechanism—just a thing he could claim was such a device. Naturally, he had to get rid of the navigation manual. Otherwise there wouldn't have been any excuse not to go to a colony. He must have memorized the coordinates of this star and the orbital elements of this planet beforehand. All he had to do, then, was disable the radio and neutrino detector, land in the opposite hemisphere from your settlement, and pretend we were on an undiscovered world."

"Did you know where you were, before coming around to this side and seeing Watson in the sky?" asked Sir John.

Teresina nodded bashfully. "I felt pretty sure of it. Once I suspected it was all a trick, I remembered having heard of a double planet in this neighborhood. And a companion of roughly equal mass is about all which could slow the rotation of a reasonably young world this much. I mean, the companions would always face each other. That accounted for the long day and night, and confirmed my suspicions.

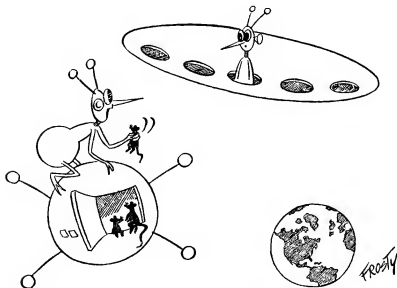
"Well, it followed from all this that the boat hadn't really been sabotaged. And I couldn't believe Newhouse had any intention of playing Robinson Crusoe forever. In a year or two or three, when he got bored, he'd pretend to have fixed the primary drive after all. Then he could discover with great astonishment that there had been a colony here all the time, that we never knew about."

"Or he might have taken you all off 'looking' for a colonial planet and 'happened'

to find another," nodded Sir John. "Jotunheim isn't far away. Or he might simply have flown off, leaving all of you in the wilderness. A proper villain, Miss! We shall certainly see that he is punished, when we find him. Though I'm afraid, this planet is so big and our police force so small, it may take weeks to identify your camp."

"No matter." Teresina smiled. "He can stay right where he is. I hope he enjoys every minute of it."

THE END



"I think it must be some kind of mouse extermination program on earth."



ELLA SPEED

By RON GOULART

ILLUSTRATED by VARGA

The trouble with creating super-women is that sometimes they actually show up.

THREE troopers, in fresh powder blue uniforms, marched by the front porch of the inn. Their silver trim glittered and their spiked spurs

rattled. Paul Dodds scratched his left side and leaned deep back into the soft wicker rocker. After the troopers were out of sight he might

try to sneak a cigarette, one of the ones he had in the sliding compartment of his loafer.

The morning sun was warming the dampness out of the air, off in the forest beyond the settlement birds were singing and fluttering. Dodds closed his eyes and put one foot on the worn porch rail, careful that the secret compartment didn't slide open and scatter his last cigarettes. He smiled slowly. Why bitch? Even if there was no smoking allowed here in the Hurford territory. Everything else was fine.

For instance, there was no music. Except for Tooker approved non-controversial folk singers. And they'd go away if you gave them some sort of coin. There were no juke boxes, no piped music, no bed-zac. They didn't have pop tunes in Hurford. Tooker thought all music, except for non-controversial folk songs and hymns, was immoral. Dodds didn't agree. He was just fed up with all the noise of his home territory.

There was no TV. Not even in schools. Tooker said TV was the devil's work. Be that as it may, it was a pleasure to sleep in a room with not one TV screen in it.

Maybe this Tooker was a

tyrant. Maybe he'd seized power and set himself up as Permanent Administrator of Hurford by underhanded and unethical means. And he might even be forcing narrow straitlaced codes on the people. But it sure was quiet and restful. That's what Dodds needed. That's why he was here.

Opening his eyes he scanned the wide simple street. The simple white and grey buildings. Not a newsstand in the whole damned town. If you wanted to read, you read tracts written by Tooker and his troopers. They handed those out free on street corners.

Best of all, the daily newspaper, a four page throwaway named after Tooker's wife, contained not one comic strip. The place for Dodds to get his grip back was certainly here, in simple moral Hurford.

His left side began to itch again and as he reached to scratch it his shoulder twitched. Looking down he saw that Cap Bascom, the small tanned innkeeper, was huddled in the flower bed just below him.

Cap touched the brim of his soft green hat and blinked at Dodds. "Killing bugs," he said, jumping up and down half-heartedly a few times.

"Pretty hard to surprise them this way. They scoot out of the way before I come down."

"Maybe you jump too high first," Dodds said, lowering his foot and leaning out. "Anyway, why don't you use insect spray?"

"I'm on the troopers' #5 list," said Cap. "Means I only get a pint a month. They figure if people get more insect spray than that they'll poison the water supply or some other public necessity." He caught the porch rail and arched up, his feet tight together. After his feet slammed into the ground, he smiled. "Got one there. Didn't kill him, but sure threw a scare into him." He glanced carefully around, pulling down his hat brim. "Got anything to pass on?"

"About killing bugs?"

Cap Bascom chuckled. "Being cryptic, huh? We expected you would." He nodded his sharp chin several times and went off around the side of the small grey inn.

Dodds was sitting up straight. The innkeeper had been acting like this ever since he'd signed the register and punched the clock the night before. He was behaving almost like an Ella Speed fan. Shaking his head, Dodds let himself ease back. That

wasn't possible. Nobody here in Hurford territory had heard of Ella Speed. He was here because that was so.

Good old Tooker again. Comics set up anti-social vibrations in the moral fibre. So there were none in Hurford territory. No strips, no books. And no Ella Speed fan clubs. This was the only territory on the whole planet where Dodds felt he could rest up and try to get himself co-ordinated again.

Five and a half years of Ella Speed had keyed him up too high. Even with two assistants to help him with the drawing, and three for the writing. It was still a strain. He felt like a hack lately. Washed up, too. An old clown who'd forgotten his best jokes.

His comic strip, Ella Speed, had been growing in popularity. First just the newspaper strip, then the comic books. Then the hard covers. The endorsements. They even had cereal bowls with Ella Speed in the bottom. And he, or his assistants, had to draw all those pictures and think up all the words to put in the balloons. When it had taken him a week to write the copy for the message in the bottom of the bowl, Dodds had real-

ized he must go some place very quiet and still. A place where no one had ever heard of Ella Speed. The strip had been sliding away from him as it grew. He had to sit quietly someplace and get himself under control. Well, here he was.

Dodds felt uneasy again. He glanced off the porch. The flower beds were empty. Someone coughed behind him.

"Lunch," said Cap Bascom.

"Lunch? Isn't it early?"

Dodds had left his watches in his room so he wouldn't be obsessed by time, which always reminded him of deadlines. "I didn't hear the gong."

"Gong's out being tuned," said Cap in a low voice. "I thought you and I might sit down to lunch a bit early and have a talk before the rest of the guests got back. They're all off snapping pictures of the tambourine factory."

Dodds stretched up out of the rocker. "Well, okay. I am hungry now I guess." He stepped around the screen door Cap was holding half open. "What did you want to say to me?"

Cap winked. "Mostly I wanted to listen." He led Dodds into the narrow dining room and put him at a table

in the corner. "I can read upside down."

Dodds picked up his napkin. "Do you prefer it?"

"I mean," said Cap, circling the opposite chair around close to Dodds'. "The minute I saw you sign the register it rang a bell."

"I thought that was out being tuned."

"That's the gong. Now don't use your celebrated wit on me, Mr. Dodds. Not that I don't enjoy it. But I'm in a serious frame of mind."

Damn it. They had heard of him. "You want an autograph?" Dodds asked, taking his soup spoon.

"Got that in the register," Cap cleared his throat. "I read Ella Speed every month. We get it smuggled across the border."

Dodds frowned. "Ella Speed?"

"Your strip. I recognized your name right off. You're taking a chance not traveling under an alias. Then most people only know the creation and not the creator. I imagine most of the troopers and border guard are like that. Me, I say, give credit where credit is due. A political thinker like you, his name I remember. And then I got one of those pictures from the inside back cover cut out and framed and

hidden in a drawer. A good likeness."

No use pretending he was a different Paul Dodds then. "That's fine. But I thought all that stuff was illegal out here." His analyst had said that and the travel bureau, too.

"It is. But we take the risk. To keep up with what's current in political thought."

Dodds tried a spoonful of soup. "Political thought? Ella Speed's just an everyday super heroine. You know, Ella Speed, the flash of the Forest."

"The Champion of Jungle Justice," added Cap Bascom. "Sworn enemy of evil and champion of what is right and proper. Those words have meant a lot to us. We're fighting against Tooker."

Hell! Now Ella Speed had him in some backwoods revolution. "That's great," Dodds said. "I tell you, Mr. Bascom. I'm out here in Hurford to rest up. On a vacation. I like to meet faithful readers because where would I be without the loyal support of thousands just like you." Damn, he was quoting that publicity release. Been doing that too much lately. A little soup would calm him down. Finally he said, "I'd rather not talk about Ella Speed right now."

Cap Bascom bit a weather-thumb, his eyes thoughtful. "I figured you came here for that."

"To rest. Yes, that's what I came for."

"No, no," said Cap, pulling his chair still closer. "I figured you came to meet Ella Speed."

It was hardly dawn. In the thin candlelight Dodds got into hiking clothes. Against his will he looked again at the small snapshot the innkeeper had given him. "Hell," he said quietly. He dealt the picture down into his suitcase, which was open on the bed. "Ella Speed my foot." After slamming the suitcase shut he shoved it away in the closet.

In his hiking pack he had enough supplies for three days. From what the manager of the general store, not an Ella Speed fan, had told him the forest beyond the town was pretty peaceful. The sleeping bag the old man had sold him was guaranteed to let you sleep safely in any kind of wilderness and fold up afterwards into a ball no bigger than a grof. Dodds wasn't sure what a grof was but the bag did fit in his closed hand.

He had decided to sneak away from the inn for a few days. Cap Bascom with his

documented rumors about a real Ella Speed was unsettling him. Dodds wanted to forget Ella Speed right now. After his vacation he'd think about the strip again and about turning it out without spilling the ink and dropping pens. But there was time for that.

Now he just wanted to wander off. He'd even broken down and bought a couple of sketch books, actually writing tablets, at the general store. Might be relaxing to sketch the less active animals in the forest. Anyway, he'd get out of the range of Cap Bascom for a few days.

Blowing out the round yellow candle he slipped out into the darkness. The inn creaked and rattled some as he made his getaway, but he was almost certain no one noticed him set off for the woods.

Just at sun-up Tooker's troopers stopped him. He was starting into the trees, along a wide path, when he noticed them. Another set of three. Bigger than the last bunch he'd noticed.

The largest was seated behind a card table on which there was a small placard. *Hiking Permits*. "Early," said the trooper, touching the slick visor of his blue cap. "What're you up to?"

Dodds stopped. "Going for a walk."

"With a knapsack?"

"A long walk," Dodds said. The other two troopers were leaning against the same wide tree trunk behind the table.

"Papers," said the seated Trooper.

As Dodds handed across his passport the other troopers came around and lifted off his pack.

"What are you smuggling?" said the trooper before opening the passport.

"Nothing much. I'm going to spend a couple days in the woods, taking it easy. Supplies in the pack."

"You a fairy?"

"No. Do I need papers to prove it?"

The trooper shook his head. "I honestly can't see who else would hang around in the forest. Just fairies and fanatics. Or honest people on business. Notice that our table is hardly in the woods at all." The trooper smiled evenly.

"Yes," said Dodds.

The trooper opened the small green book Dodds had given him and removed the assorted permits. "Paul Dodds. Good gracious that's familiar. And I don't know many people outside the territory."

The other two troopers stopped unpacking Dodds'

pack. "Darn," said one. I think I've heard that name, too. It's naggingly familiar."

Dodds tried to imitate the trooper's even smile and kept silent.

The chief trooper turned a slip of pink paper over between his fingers. "Special permit. You must have influence."

The syndicate publicity department had arranged most of the details of his vacation. Dodds took back the passport the trooper was holding out. "Things okay then?"

"Ship shape."

After the troopers had got most of his gear back in the sack Dodds nodded a goodbye and started into the woods. When he felt he was out of sight he started running. The troopers might remember where they heard the name.

Dodds camped that night by a small pond well into the forest. The trip so far had been pretty dull, but it was probably doing him good. When he got back he'd get Ella Speed under control. One of his assistants, Bockman, was already doing a better job than he was. The syndicate might suggest giving Bockman the daily strip soon. He was already doing the Sunday page.

No, it would be okay. He'd have to come up with some good story lines. That was all. Dodds hadn't had a first rate idea for three months. Not since he'd had Edmund Speare, the arch-fiend of five planets, fill all the public drinking fountains with aphasia serum causing all the citizens to forget their street addresses. Soon transportation was snarled and if it hadn't been for Ella Speed . . .

Cap Bascom was demented. Dodds was sure of that now. There wasn't a real Ella Speed out here in Hurford. The snapshot back in his suitcase was probably the graduation picture of some niece of Cap's. Or maybe it was some half-assed publicity scheme publicity had come up with. They didn't always tell him everything anymore. That's probably what happened.

Dodds concentrated on freeing his mind of worry. Think up a new plot. Okay, suppose Edmund Speare, the arch fiend of five planets, opens an inn and lures the territory's leading musical comedy stars there. The chambermaid is his lovely daughter, Furina, in . . .

The sound and smell of cooking woke him. Apparently his sleeping bag had tried to return to its original pocket size shape during the

night. He couldn't seem to move.

A red bearded man with two large emerald earrings was looking down at him. "Good morning," Dodds said. "I'm trapped in my sleeping bag or I'd shake hands. My name's Paul Dodds."

"I know, sonny," said the bearded man.

Another fan. He'd have to stop using his real name. "Oh?"

"I can read. Taught myself by mail." The man held up Dodds' wallet and passport and then tapped them in the palm of his hand. "Saw your name right in here. In fact, I read off your name before I touched your money. That's part of my code."

Dodds tilted his chin and noticed he was tied up with thick yellow rope. "I sleep too soundly. Especially when I'm tired. You snuck up on me."

"Could have done it with you awake. Sneaking, that's my specialty."

"Really? What line of work are you in?"

"Highwayman. Bruce Breakaway's my trade name."

"Catchy name." He noted a large gold letter B on the pocket of Breakaway's red coat. "Rob people, do you?"

"Right. And sometimes I

ravish ladies of high station if the mood hits me. You don't get many of them passing through here since they built the freeway."

"After you rob people you usually untie them and let them go."

"Most always," said Breakaway. He lifted Dodds and propped him against a tree trunk in a sitting position. There were three other bearded red-suited men circling the breakfast campfire. "My band. I've had a strong influence on them. They imitate me in their habit and dress. Hell, though. Everybody needs someone to look up to."

"So after you rob you turn the victims loose? I didn't catch your answer."

"Take your case." Breakaway walked to the fire and took the coffee mug one of his band had filled for him. "You we might torture first. See, we don't get many young people out this way. They're best for torturing."

"I'm thirty-two."

"Best age," said Breakaway, drinking half the steaming coffee. "While you were sleeping Ned, he's the one in the middle, suggested we dump you over a precipice. Trouble is the nearest one of those is forty miles north.

Seems like an awful lot of trouble to go through for such a fleeting satisfaction."

"I thought it was the tradition for highwaymen to be gentlemen," said Dodds. "Is it gentlemanly to dump me over a cliff?"

"I told you we'd ruled that out. It pretty much looks like we'll dunk you in the pond."

"Dunk," said Dodds. "Like a doughnut? You'll pull me out again."

"At first," said Breakaway. "My men lose interest so quickly. They have little intellectual curiosity. Myself, I could spend the whole day drowning someone."

Dodds decided to offer them money. If they'd take him back to the inn he could wire the syndicate for more money. The syndicate would send it. Bockman wasn't doing that well on the Sunday page. "Money," he began.

Ned, the road agent in the middle, shot to his feet and then flipped over, a feathered arrow in his shoulder.

Bruce Breakaway reached to his holster. "I thought we'd ditched that broad." An arrow pinned his big hand to his side.

One of the bandits actually got a pistol out and raised. An arrow in the calf made him jump and lose the gun in the

pond. The last bandit decided to run.

Dry leaves fell from above. And shortly a girl followed. A tall slender girl with long golden hair. She wore yellow shorts and a black sweater with golden eagle wings across the chest. "I thought I told you guys to knock this stuff off," she said.

She was Ella Speed.

Dodds wouldn't look at the girl while she untied him. He watched Bruce Breakaway and his men scatter away into the forest. It was a fine delusion. At any rate it was strong enough to scare off four real highwaymen.

"Wiggle your fingers," said the girl, stepping back. "Toes, too."

Dodds closed his eyes and didn't wiggle anything.

"Come on. Start your circulation. Otherwise you'll feel prickly all over when you try to walk."

The girl was still there when Dodds let himself open his eyes. "What's your name?" Maybe it was a coincidence that she looked like his comic character.

"Ella Speed," she said, half-kneeling to pick up the passport and wallet Breakaway had dropped.

"Was that your mother's

name, too? Or are you named after a rich aunt?"

The girl smiled. Some of Dodd's permits had dropped out of the passport. She opened it to put them back. "Oh, my," she said. "Your name is Paul Dodds."

"I was named after an uncle who cleaned up in shady telekinesis dealings."

"*The Paul Dodds?*" Her green eyes grew wide. "The man who fights courageously for freedom and justice."

"No. I do a comic strip."

"Then you do draw *Ella Speed?*"

"Yes." Apparently she was an *Ella Speed* fan.

The girl moved back and knelt in a patch of orange grass. "I owe you so much, Mr. Dodds. I never thought I'd meet you. Not for many years anyway. Till my work was done."

The girl's hair caught the sun for a moment. She seemed very real. "Is this some game you play?" She looked about twenty, old for games.

"No," she said. "My name—my real name—is Sue Whitfield. I suppose you know the situation in our territory." She stood and walked to the still burning fire. "Break-away's boys make good coffee. I could use a cup. You?"

"Fine," said Dodds, starting to wiggle his fingers and toes. "I know a few things about Hurford. Fellow named Cap Bascom, runs the inn where I'm staying, told me a little."

The girl frowned and handed him a cup of the highway-men's coffee. "Didn't you come here to fight the opression first hand? I've always thought of you as that sort of man."

Resting the cup on his knee Dodds said, "I just do an adventure strip. I don't live it."

"A great many people here have been affected by your fine work."

The circulation department hadn't told him he had any readers out here. "How so?"

"We're fighting against Tooker. Some of us live in the forests. Our underground operates in the villages and towns. We have quite a library of *Ella Speed* magazines."

He wondered how the underground found time to read comic books. "You have a revolutionary group?"

"Of course," said Sue, sitting on the ground near him and cradling her coffee cup in both palms. "So far you're one of the few outsiders who has taken an interest in our work. Such fine propaganda."

"I've never heard of your cause."

Sue tilted her head, puzzled. "Surely, the things Ella Speed says. 'Justice must triumph over evil.' and 'Tyranny must topple.' Surely, this applies to our fight against Tooker."

The last quote Dodds could not place. Maybe one of his assistants had written it. Ella Speed said lots of things like that, usually while beating up Edmund Speare.

"And isn't," said Sue, with her eyes lowered, "Edmund Speare a thinly disguised version of Tooker?"

"Edmund Speare is the villain of 900 faces," said Dodds. "He could be 900 people thinly disguised. He isn't any of them."

Sue walked to the edge of the pool. "I've lived here in the forest most of my life. That's nineteen years, fifteen under the rule of Tooker. My father had been a circus acrobat. After a fall, which didn't hurt him but frightened him some, he left show business and became a teacher. He married then and finally came here to write a book on acrobatics. We had an uncle who cleaned up in telekenesis, too. So there was a little money. When Tooker gained control dad stopped writing, there

would have been no place for the book to be printed."

"Tooker surpresses acrobatics, too?"

"Everything. So father and mother raised me here. My dad taught me all the things I know. Since they died, four and five years ago, I've lived alone. I was about thirteen when I read my first Ella Speed book. Dad had a friend who smuggled things in for us."

"Must have been one of my first mags."

"Number three. I still have it. In one of our caves." She turned to him. "I was sure from the start that you were describing the situation here, in oblique terms. Allegory, as my father called it. For instance, when Edmund Speare locked four scientists in a room that gradually shrank and pressed in on them . . . well, that was certainly Tooker and his treatment of all our teachers and professors."

Dodds got that idea from a kine serial he'd seen as a kid on Mars. "You could interpret it that way. But I still don't quite see why the costume."

"I'm not the only one who follows your work. Many people do. If Edmund Speare is Tooker, Ella Speed is the o-

position. I decided three years ago we needed a symbol of opposition. A real Ella Speed. We've always suffered from confused leadership. I was suited to the Ella Speed part, what with dad's training and all, so I assumed it. We've done very well." She shrugged faintly. "I don't know now. If you say Ella Speed has nothing to do with our cause. You may be angry. Sue us."

"Look, I'm sorry. You over-rated me. I'm just a hack. Grind out the stuff. I'm on the side of good because it sells. People identify with Ella Speed and they like to see her win."

"I identified too strongly." Sue put her hands behind her back. "Do you wish it to stop?"

"No, Sue. You're free to do what you want." When he got back it would make a good publicity story. "I'm on your side."

"Are you? You didn't come here to help, though. Or to speak to our people."

"I didn't come here to get involved in anything. I came because I was told Hurford territory was so strait-laced and old-fashioned that nothing went on. Nobody mentioned a damn revolution."

"I see."

There was a metallic thrashing sound off to their right and before Sue could fit an arrow to her bow a black bicycle carrying Cap Bascom shot out of the forest and sprayed leaves until it stopped half into the dying camp fire. "Bad news," said Cap, breathing through his mouth.

Sue helped him get the bike free of the fire and put the kick stand down. "What is it?"

The innkeeper nodded at Dodds. "He's in trouble."

Dodds moved up to them. "With who?"

"Tooker's troopers."

"They liked me okay yesterday. A little surly, but they let me pass."

"They make a weekly inspection. Supposed to be for health and clean habits, but it's so they can look in closets. They searched your room."

"Nothing there but my suitcase."

"I didn't know you didn't take that picture of Sue with you. When I saw you sneaking off yesterday I figured you was coming to see her. Anyhow they found the picture in your portmanteau."

Sue grinned. "You collect pictures of me, Mr. Dodds?"

Cap Bascom twisted an ear. "He thought I was kidding. So I showed him that snap-

shot I took on your last birthday."

"And now the troopers think he's one of us," said Sue, still grinning faintly.

Cap's head bobbed. "Right you are, Sue. They got a man hidden in the folding bed. Waiting for him to come back."

Sue put her hands on her hips. "Then he won't come back."

"I have to go back," said Dodds. If he didn't get back to the syndicate Bockman would take over for sure.

"Not to the inn," said Sue. "Forget your luggage for now. I'll lead you to a spot where you can sneak over the border and get a train home."

Dodds was relieved. "Fine. I hate to cut my vacation short, but I guess I wouldn't have much time for hiking and trying to dodge Tooker's troopers, too. Let's go."

Sue shook her head. "I have a rally to conduct two nights from now. The border is three days off. I can't lead you there till after my meeting."

"Can't Cap do it?"

"Not on that," said Cap Bascom, pointing at his bike. "Rugged country beyond the forest. Anyhow, the troopers still think I'm okay. I've got to be back at the inn by meal-

time. Pot roast tonight. My specialty. Recipe I got from an uncle who went broke speculating in the telekenesis market." Cap had his bike back on the trail. He waved goodbye and after a running start leaped into the seat and pedaled off.

"Fortunate I stumbled on you," said Sue. "Gave Cap a chance to catch up." She handed him his pack. "I hope you realize I've saved you twice already."

"I won't count the second one until we're out of Hurford."

"May be up to three or four by then." She left him and walked into the forest. "Come on. To my camp."

Dodds followed. Damn it. His vacation was ending and he still hadn't come up with a new Ella Speed idea.

The smoke rose thick through the darkness, spiraling out through the hole in the cavern roof. "We'll stay here and then move camp again in a week or so," said Sue. "That's the system. Like the way Ella Speed operated when she was being hunted on Mars. Keep moving."

"Do Tooker's troopers come this far into the forest to hunt you?" Dodds asked, trying to make out the dozen or so men

and women scattered around the cave.

"Usually not. They've too much to do in the settlements. But I'm—Ella Speed is a special target for them. So at times they make a special effort. Our real trouble is meeting places. They're closer to the towns."

Dodds edged his stool back a little. "And you expect eventually to overthrow Tooker?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"With raids. With meetings and rallies. Eventually we'll be ready for a big push. It will take time. Planning, organizing, gathering weapons and supplies."

"Going to use anything besides bows and arrows?"

"Of course. That's a symbol, too." She shook her head. "You sure you want me to go on as Ella Speed?"

Dodds watched her face against the firelight. He was embarrassed by her taking him for a propagandist. But a real Ella Speed was a good exploitation gimmick. "Yes, certainly, Sue."

"You think it's childish, though."

"I don't want credit for qualities I don't have."

"You created Ella Speed. All on your own."

"Yes," he said. Back then it had been his own.

"I don't think you like her," said Sue, recrossing her legs. "Or believe in her. Or the things she says."

"It's just a strip. For entertainment."

"You take a stand in it."

"Sure. Sure." The look on her face bothered him.

"Well, we want to stop Tooker." Sue stood, her stool scraping away. "And what do you want?"

Dodds blinked up at her. "Me? I'm just an old prostitute. I don't want anything much. I sold out long ago. Certainly I don't want to pretend I'm a hero and run around in a fancy costume."

"You don't need a costume to pretend," she said.

"I've seen a lot more of this planet than you, so don't get profound." He stood, too.

"You won't speak at our meeting tomorrow? Even during intermission?"

"I told you, no. Is it okay to go outside for awhile?"

"Yes. Don't fall in any holes." She turned from him quickly.

The three people near the entrance smiled at Dodds as he walked out into the early evening.

This was one Ella Speed

fan club that had gotten out of hand.

When the first trooper boot hit the metal ladder Dodds dived back into the storeroom of the basement meeting hall. It was an automatic reaction. And by the time he thought it over he was behind a stack of dummy packing cases, listening to the fighting outside.

Actually, Dodds hadn't expected the meeting to be raided. Nothing very revolutionary happened. The thing started off with the showing of a film. Not a documentary knocking Tooker. An old silent comedy, one of the forms of entertainment Tooker outlawed. Then Sue, in a fresh Ella Speed costume, gave the fifty or so people there a short speech about their goal. That was followed by an announcement of dancing, to the music of two smuggled in jazz lps played on a bootleg phonograph.

So maybe Tooker was a tyrant at that. Dodds didn't want to get involved. That was why he hadn't allowed Sue to introduce him. As it was several people had found out who he was. It had reminded him of an autograph party at a newsstand until the troopers broke in.

The fighting in the meeting

room sounded hand to hand now. Dodds heard the old wind-up phonograph smash against a wall. Feet shuffled on the stone floor, metal and leather scraped.

"For shame," shouted a surprised trooper. "Hitting below the belt."

Dodds stepped back carefully and checked the dark storeroom. By moving a pile of unused hymn books under the only window he should be able to climb out. The window looked to open on about ground level.

"A nasty habit," said the nasal voice in the next room. "Such trash." Paper was torn. "And so it seems that right has won a speedy victory."

"I didn't expect so many," said Sue. She sounded as though someone were holding her.

"We had a notion you'd be here for sure."

"I thought the guards would warn us."

"Where do you think we got the notion?"

"They sold out?"

"Starting the first of next week one will have a key position in our leading tambourine factory. The other will be foreman of a large epaulet shop. Who says squealers never profit?"

"Horse crap," said Sue.

She never learned that from Ella Speed. Dodds wondered if he should risk a look into the meeting room.

"Off we go," said the nasal-voiced trooper. "Soon you'll find yourselves reading proof in a hymnal plant. The price of such low habits." More paper was torn.

When the last footsteps sounded on the ceiling above Dodds risked a look. The room was empty, the harsh overhead light still burning. Dodd would wait a few minutes more and then sneak off. He had a fair idea which way the border lay. A two-day trip probably and Sue had shown him how to live off the forest while he traveled.

Bright fragments of paper scattered under his feet. Damn it, Ella Speed magazines. That's what those swine had been ripping up.

And this wasn't one of the stories his assistants had done either. This was his stuff. Tooker had no taste.

It wasn't right ripping up good stuff like this. Arresting Sue wasn't right either.

Now he was starting to think like an Ella Speed fan. The thing to do was get out. Leave Sue alone. It was her fault that she read too much into his stuff.

But it was his stuff. And

Sue was in a way his responsibility.

In what way? He asked himself this as he climbed the ladder.

Too late anyhow. He was outside, running into the night. And planning. How to save Sue and the rest.

An ambush was needed. In six years of Ella Speed Dodds had worked out enough of those. The only weapon he had was a small blaster pistol Sue had loaned him. Crouched in the cool night outside of the old warehouse Dodds reconnoitered. The first thing to do was to decide which way they had gone.

Faint rustlings and murmurs to the right. That was the direction. And now jungle warfare was called for. Cunning and psychology. He must convince the troopers, however many, that he was a whole platoon himself. How many in a platoon? Research usually handled stuff like that.

He zigzagged quietly along the trail the others had taken. Sure enough, in a few minutes he'd caught up with them, troopers and prisoners.

Avoiding anything that looked likely to crackle underfoot, Dodds dodged into the forest. Once off the trail he pushed ahead until he was

alongside the mid-section of the slow-moving party. The one with the nasal voice had Sue at his side up near the front. The louse was making snide remarks about Ella Speed.

Dodds squinted upward. There was a sturdy looking vine. It led up into a dark tree with branches that stretched and twisted across the trail. Once up there he could knock off a trooper. Then, using the other vine he'd spotted, he'd swing back across the path, firing again as he did. Swinging back and forth should give the illusion that he was a large fighting force. It could cause enough confusion to give Sue and her followers a chance to turn on the two dozen troopers. Similar plans had worked dozens of times in Ella Speed. The surprise was what did it.

Dodds realized he would have to hurry. There looked to be a clearing ahead. Be hard to swing over that. He checked the blaster and jammed it into his belt, the way space pirates did. Taking a deep breath he jumped for the vine. He missed. He hesitated, to see if anyone had noticed the crash. There were a lot of night birds fluttering around. Their cries must have covered

the sound of his falling back into the brush.

On the third try Dodds got the vine. He wasn't much on forestry and so he hadn't expected the vine to be dotted with fine thorns. He got up it anyway.

Gritting his teeth he swung himself onto a branch, catching it with his arched legs.

The rear guard troopers were already passing below, probably making wisecracks about Ella Speed. Dodds flexed his prickled hands and gingerly got out the pistol. He stepped to the next branch and grabbed the vine he was going to use to swing across.

The night birds were getting thick in the dark woods up ahead. Dodds grimaced. Maybe if he swung at an angle he'd get close enough for a shot at the last troopers. By the time they'd turned he'd be in that clump of bushes.

The swing began well. He had time to aim his pistol and fire. He decided to yell after he fired. There was no underestimating the effect of a good unexpected yell.

The shot came off but as he started the yell several other people cried out, too, and it detracted from the shock value. He noticed also that his arc was not turning out as he'd planned. As he drifted

toward the ground he realized that his vine had come unattached above. He let go of his end just as he landed in a tangle of fronds and brush. It was far from what he planned.

"You almost screwed up our ambush," said Sue, handing him a cup of water. "Still I'm glad you didn't desert. How's your hand?"

Dodds shifted in the wicker chair and took the water in his good hand. "I draw with the good one anyway."

"And your foot?"

"Coming along."

"Ankle?"

"Feels okay." He drank some water. "You should have mentioned that you expected the raid and had set up the ambush."

"You didn't seem interested."

"I didn't realize how miserable Tooker's troopers were. They even tore up some Ella Speed mags."

"They stop at nothing." Sue smiled.

"I'm sorry I fouled things up."

"It's an honor to have had you participate. The propaganda value will be great." She sat on an old folding canvas chair. "This camp is closer to the border. We can take you across in another day

or so, when you're feeling okay."

"Until that vine went I was getting a kick out of ambushing all those troopers," Dodds said.

"I'm glad you had fun."

"I didn't mean that," Dodds said. "It was because it all seemed like the right thing to do."

Sue nodded.

"If Tooker is upset and a new government comes in things will loosen up," Dodds said. "And among other things that would mean Ella Speed could be sold here. Isn't that so?"

"There would be no restrictions on literature of any kind."

"Then the sooner Tooker goes, the sooner I get all these new markets."

"I'll see to it that you're kept posted on how we're doing. So you can let your printers know."

"Now," said Dodds, gesturing at his pack, which rested against a cot leg, "if you can smuggle mags in, you can smuggle drawings out."

"We could probably," Sue said, handing him the pack.

"Could you round me up ink, pens and paper?" He dropped the pack between his knees, opening it.

"We raid some of Tooker's

printing plants sometimes. Yes. Why?"

"Would you mind if I stayed on for awhile? Joined your staff. I think I could help out and draw in my spare time. The way some of the old war cartoonists used to do. Or would I be a hindrance?" He had taken one of the tablets out of his pack and moved

the pack off to one side.

"The propaganda value would be great," Sue said, handing him a pencil as he opened the pad. "And it might be fun." She touched his hand lightly and left the tent.

Dodds mumbled something and started making rough sketches. He had a pretty good story idea now. **THE END**

COMING NEXT MONTH

FANTASTIC proudly announces an exclusive of importance to all readers of science-fiction. In the May issue we will publish—for the first time in a professional science-fiction magazine—a long-lost story by the master of the macabre, the late H. P. Lovecraft.



The famed H. P. L.'s *The Challenge from Beyond* was written more than 20 years ago for use in a fanzine. But the story still stands today as an excellent example of Lovecraft's ability to stir the souls of men.

To accompany this scoop, the May **FANTASTIC** also features a critical analysis of Lovecraft's work and life by the well-known historian of science-fiction, Sam Moskowitz. The Lovecraft article, *A Study in Horror*, is the first of a series Mr. Moskowitz is writing for **FANTASTIC** about famous s-f authors.

Because of the importance of the Lovecraft exclusives, the May **FANTASTIC** will sell out quickly. To be sure of getting your copy, it is imperative for you to reserve your copy with your newsdealer now. The May **FANTASTIC** will be on sale April 21.



According to you...

Dear Editor:

Having as yet written nothing for which editors will pay and having written but few letters to editors, I am a qualified critic.

Have just waded through the January issue of *Fantastic*.

Am myself all in favor of plastering the shallows with their proper labels, viewing with alarm the disease-germs in our current body-politic, etc., etc. My one published tiny volume is an essay on philosophic thinking with-view to corrective influence on the mass-mind.

Am thoroughly in accord with your editorial policy concerning the mix of fiction and moral suasion. Do you not also think the "viewing with alarm" can be overdone in fiction?

Even Robert Bloch's excellent technique does not cover the excessive slams in his story "The Funnel of God." This title, for my money, might better be "The fun-hole of God." I now see why many of my writing instructors have warned me against putting half a dozen stories into one. And as to ending the story by killing both villain and hero and the world while claiming that these never had existed anyway . . . well, this may have been the lordly Bloch's way of interpreting the absolute, abstract MOTION which is the unceasing in-and-out breath of the cosmos . . . like night swallows day and spits it out again in the morning??? But Robert did not prophecy the next morning's expectoration.

Well, most of the stories in this issue do seem to end up in a manner that is almost a credit to old man Aesop . . . "MORAL; Brotherhood is a fact in Nature." The old lady chopping down the LEECH is the most subtle message in the issue, seems to me. Here the reader is not impaled by the moral at the end. The story tells its own moral. Very good, what?

Any fifth-grade reader would know at once that the jolly old Retief in that story "Diplomat at Arms" was the missing Emperor's descendant, but I do not know how the author could have kept his secret.

Will suggest that *Fantastic* will have a longer life if the "alarm-viewing-with" is packaged in wrappers of subtlety... such as needles that give it to you before you know it, instead of steam-rollers that flatten you out as they roll. But maybe the other 149 million will not agree.

I may as well try my interplanetary story "The Ooglogs" on you, as these Venusian vampires are the source of much of the human trouble on earth. Will have revised copy ready in a week or two, I hope. I spend too much time roller-skating, I guess.

Miles MacAlpin
7540 1/2-S. W. 51st
Portland, Oregon

• *Did you ever try typing while on rollerskates? It might speed up your output. Still, we would view such an event with our usual alarm.*

Dear Editor:

Glad to see Frank Herbert in *Fantastic Science Fiction*. I thought that the February issue was one of the greatest issues that you have ever put together. With such good stories like, "Priests of Psi" it sure started wonderfully—and "Mariana," by Leiber. I think that this is one of the best short stories that he ever wrote. You could never give me enough of these kind of stories if they came out every week.

James W. Ayers
609 First St.
Attalla, Ala.

• *Aw shucks, 'tain't nothin'!*

Dear Editor:

I have been reading *Fantastic* for about three years. I was first attracted to your magazine by the name, as I am an avid reader of occult and horror stories, I paged through your magazine and found it packed with the type of stories I like. I

have enjoyed the magazine ever since, but now I see on the cover the words *Science Fiction*. Does this mean you have changed the type of stories you are going to print? I hope not, I have nothing against s-f, in fact I collect it, but my real joy is a thrilling horror story or one of the occult. I hope you continue printing this type of story, but if you don't, oh, well, I'll buy the magazine anyway.

The issue I was referring to above was December. It was about fair. I didn't like the lead novel, "A Message in Secret," by Poul Anderson. He has done much better than this. I hope he doesn't continue to write about Domnic Flandry. Personally I hate the man, to me he seems like a well assured aristocrat who thinks he's pretty good. I know a lot of Anderson's fans won't like what I think about Flandry, but that won't change my mind.

Another thing, what happened to the cartoons? Try to make your editorials longer, they're good but far too short. I also read your sister publication *Amazing*, but enjoy *Fantastic* more. Guess that's about all I can complain about. Oh, yes, why don't you enlarge your magazine and make the type smaller. Use the type size as in *Amazing*.

Wesley Sharp

755 Road Q

Okauchee, Wisconsin

● *Well, you seem to have covered everything. As soon as we have a week free, we'll answer all those questions.*

Dear Editor:

You got off to a flying start in the new year with the January issue of *Fantastic*. Evelyn Goldstein's story "Days of Darkness" was most enjoyable. You should get more of her work. "The Funnel of God" by Bob Bloch was another masterpiece of social criticism and should be highly commended.

Your editorial discussing Mr. Bloch's writings was very interesting and I agree profoundly with all three parts of the issue debating the plausibility, being, and right to be a tool of social criticism . . . by science fiction. There is little doubt that it is the most popular literature in the U. S. today; why shouldn't it serve as a method of social criticism? Bob has merely expressed the feelings of many others like myself in

his two stories "The Last Plea" and "The Funnel of God." I am anxiously awaiting another piece along the same line. Keep up the good work in '60. You're off to a great start with the two stories I have mentioned, don't fall along the wayside.

Billy Joe Plott
P.O. Box 654
Opelika, Ala.

- *We may fall elsewhere, but never by the wayside.*

Dear Editor:

It has just occurred to me that writing to the editor can be such great fun, whether one's letter makes the Readers' column or not, and so, after many I-should-write-and-say-a-thing-or-two moments, with this letter I enter the field.

R. D. Miller, in the December issue prompted this outburst, this shattering of the I-should-writes. And my question to him—or anyone like him—is, what could be more "weird" than T. L. Thomas' short "The Clone"? Wow! Square business, like you say, first class stuff. Or for that matter the Sharkey opus which certainly isn't s-f. Evidently the transition to s-f hasn't completely been made—if such was intended by the change of sub-title. My compliments on the "mixture" even though I might find fault with the individual renderings as the aforementioned Sharkey attempt to apply additional torque to an already over-stressed bar.

Frank P. Pretto
403 E. 157th St.
Bronx 51, N. Y.

- *The "mixture" is our aim.*

Dear Editor:

Reading your letter department I note the wish of some writers to see reprints. The readers can be pleased when there are several stories to choose from, but the odds are five-to-one that one particular tale will please *everyone*. What brings this on was the mention of Lovecraft. No doubt, with the eerie stuff Lovecraft was up there on top.

As the date-line of this letter is December 31st, it seems fit-

ting that all should come in conjunction . . . Lovecraft's most gruesome story . . . and the demolition of a certain area of Boston's streets. The tale I refer to is "Pickman's Model." The street area . . . is that North End section that was used as a setting for the story. Certainly "Pickman's Model" was the most chilling and macabre piece I've read by the author, and about as good and *different* a horror piece as I've seen in print. I dwell on this subject because this particular locale no longer exists. Being a Bostonian by proxy, and addicted to ramblings, I stumbled into Chamber Street early at dawn one gray Sunday, and remembering his tale took place in this locality, and sharing perhaps Lovecraft's susceptibilities, I was struck by the barrenness and chill aspect of this narrow thoroughfare and the other narrow tenement streets that angled from it. Nothing animate was in sight—neither humans nor dogs. The houses seemed to frown upon each other; windows were broken, rooms empty, padlocks on the old cellar doors . . . it was a scene of utter desolation. Of course, later I realized the section had been evacuated, but there was no faking my feelings of disembodiment, of grim unearthliness. Lovecraft couldn't have chosen a more suitable setting for something downright macabre, and should you decide to reprint, you couldn't choose a prettier piece of fustian evil than Pickman's experience.

Michael W. Elm
181 W. Brookline St.
Boston, Mass.

- *Have you been in Philadelphia lately?*





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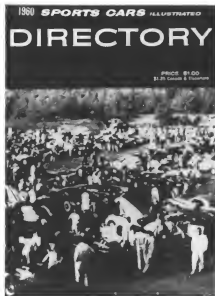
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